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The Eldership of the church
of Scotland

THE
ELDERSHIP
OF THE
CHURCH OF SCOTLAND.

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THE
ELDERSHIP
OF THE
CHURCH OF SCOTLAND.

THE DIVINE AUTHORITY OF THE OFFICE—THE DUTIES
AND QUALIFICATIONS—POPULAR MODE OF APPOINT-
MENT—HISTORICAL AND PRACTICAL VIEWS—COM-
PRISING ALSO A RARE TRACT BY GUTHRIE THE
MARTYR, ETC., ETC.

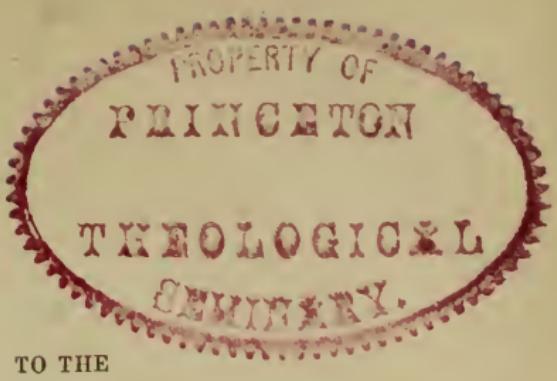
BY THE ✓
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TO THE

KIRK-SESSION AND CONGREGATION
OF ST. DAVID'S,

THE FOLLOWING LITTLE WORK,

DESIGNED TO VINDICATE AND ILLUSTRATE IMPORTANT PRINCIPLES

IN CONNECTION WITH

THE OFFICE OF RULING ELDER,
IS INSCRIBED,

WITH WARMEST WISHES FOR THEIR WELFARE,

AND

FERVENT PRAYERS FOR THE PROSPERITY OF THE CHURCH
OF CHRIST GENERALLY,

BY THEIR ATTACHED PASTOR,

THE AUTHOR.

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PREFACE.

HAVING recently had my attention called more particularly than usual to the Eldership in the Presbyterian Church, I found in common with friends in different quarters a great want of works on the subject, embracing in a short compass such knowledge regarding the office as seemed most desirable to diffuse at the present day. The Rev. Dr. Burns of Paisley, in his important work on Pauperism, has a chapter on the Eldership ; but the book is now almost inaccessible, and the chapter is written chiefly with an eye to the Eldership, in connection with the management of the poor. The Rev. Mr. Lewis of Dundee published a valuable pamphlet on the subject a few years ago ; but it is chiefly designed to stir up to the faithful discharge of the duties of the office, by contrasting the present with the past state of the Eldership in Scotland, and showing, from a particular example, what still may be done even in a large town. This is a very important view, but does not exhaust the points as to which many wish for information, especially at the present day. The Presbyterian Review, of Nov. 1834 and Jan. 1835, contains two admirable articles on the Eldership, understood to be written by Alexander Dunlop, Esq., advocate—himself a noble specimen of an able and devoted Elder of the Church of Scotland. But the work is not generally accessible, and the views discussed chiefly regard the office as it appears in the standards of the Church, its present state, the causes of its decline, and the means of its renovation—the last consisting mainly of a recommendation of the popular election of the elders by the communicants of the church. The most complete treatise which I have seen on the subject, and to which I gladly acknowledge my obligations in the following pages, is a work

'On the Office of the Ruling Elder, by Dr. Samuel Miller, Professor of Ecclesiastical History in the Presbyterian College of Princeton, New Jersey.' But the work is large for the general reader: though republished in this country it is little known: and though as a whole most excellent, it contains sentiments on various important points which no consistent member of the Church of Scotland can approve or recommend. In these circumstances I have felt that there was not only room but a call for a short treatise which should be universally accessible, comprising a vindication of the Scripture authority of the office of Ruling Elder, full views of its duties and qualifications, a representation of the sentiments of the standards and laws of the Church of Scotland on the subject, addresses to elders and people where an appointment is made to the office, and various testimonies from experience to the safety and desirableness of the popular election of Elders at the present day. I have thought, moreover, that to preface these with the republication of an unknown but valuable tract on the Eldership, ascribed to the Rev. James Guthrie of Stirling, one of the celebrated martyrs of the Scottish Church, would materially add to the interest and usefulness of the little work.

While anxious to avoid unnecessary controversy about church government and order at a period when the friends of evangelical religion of all churches should be united against many and formidable common foes, it is impossible to shut one's eyes to the fact that in various quarters there is a growing disposition to assail the peculiarities of the Presbyterian church; nay, to call in question and deny the validity of her administration of ordinances. Hence it is well that her members should be alive to her claims, and should be armed with weapons for defending them, and repelling the assaults of opponents. Not a few, especially of late, have allowed themselves to think and to speak very disparagingly of the Presbyterian church as a whole; but it should be borne in mind, that she claims a high, even an apostolic origin—that prior to the rise of Popery the Church of Scotland was Presbyterian—that during the reign of

the “Man of sin,” the faithful witnessing Waldenses were Presbyterian—that at the reformation Presbyterianism was recovered, and, with the exception of England, spread almost throughout the whole of Protestant christendom—Switzerland, Germany, France, Hungary, Holland, Scotland, &c.—that almost one half of the Protestants of England—when evangelical religion was most prevalent throughout her borders, were also Presbyterian—that the founders of the Christian church in the new world were Presbyterian—and that at the present day the most extensive and powerful of the Christian denominations of America is the Presbyterian Church in its different branches. It is to be remembered that the members of the Presbyterian church have not only been all along very numerous, and continue to be so throughout Protestant christendom, and are rapidly increasing in their numbers both at home and abroad; but that the ministers of the Presbyterian church have been as well educated and learned, yea as a whole more so perhaps than those of any other Christian church—that they have been as sound in the evangelic faith, and where there has been decline have been as early and extensively revived as any others; and that social advantages, to say the least, have been as marked in the train of Presbyterianism as in the train of any of its rivals: Witness the intellectual, moral, and religious character, and through it the social condition of Scotland, Switzerland, Holland, the north of Ireland, the Presbyterian parts of the United States, as compared with the character and condition of the country where Presbyterianism is unknown¹—witness also the services of Presbyterianism in behalf of civil and religious freedom. It maybe added that in those cases where there has been a decline in the religion and morality of any part of the Presbyterian church, this very frequently may be traced to the previous degeneracy or abandonment of her peculiar principles of government; and whether this admit of proof or not, it is certain that her people in point of knowledge and character, even where fallen, will be found fully equal to Episcopilians or

¹ For some practical proofs of the beneficial operation of Presbyterian church government, see Appendix.

Congregationalists in the same circumstances. Such being leading and well known facts in connection with the Presbyterian church, it must be very unreasonable for any party to speak lightly of a body so large in numbers and high in character, and powerful in influence. Most of all is it preposterous for a party, probably not constituting the tenth part of Protestant Christendom, and not more eminent for talent, learning, education, piety, and moral worth, than their neighbour, if indeed they are as eminent, to unchurch the Presbyterian and all other Christian churches, and declare their ordinances null and void while unable themselves to produce *one* testimony from the Word of God in behalf of their own extravagant pretensions—pretensions not only disowned by Scripture, and the earliest records of the primitive church, and of the Church of England herself in her purest days, but in themselves presumptuous, uncharitable, generally allied to serious error, and always unfriendly to Christian liberty and union of sympathy and effort for the conversion of the world by the universal propagation of the gospel of Christ.

Since unhappily the semi-popish pretensions to which I refer are understood to be on the encrease in Great Britain, it is the more necessary to spread information on the Scripture authority of the office of the Ruling Elder. This office is at utter war with such unscriptural claims, and would, had it been adopted in the Church of England, have prevented their rise. The general understanding now of its true nature is well fitted to check and counteract their progress. There is nothing more likely to expose proud pretension to exclusive Christianity, because flowing through a particular organisation, than to show that the organisation is itself essentially defective—leaving out what both the word of God and apostolic and primitive antiquity demand shall be present. I commend the work to the care and blessing of the great Head of the church, whose honour in the vindication of the office, and thereby the growing efficiency of the Christian church, it is designed to promote.

JOHN G. LORIMER.

May, 1841.

NOTICE OF REV. JAMES GUTHRIE.

I HAVE been indebted for a sight of the following interesting Tract to the kindness of the Rev. Mr. Omund of Monzie. The copy bears to have been the gift of the eminent Lord Grange to the Kirk-session of Salt Preston, or Prestonpans, May, 1726. It is usually, and I believe without any question, attributed to the pen of James Guthrie of Stirling, the brother of William Guthrie of Fenwick, author of the ‘Trial of a Saving Interest in Christ.’ The writer is well known as a distinguished minister and martyr of the Church of Scotland. He was honoured to live at a period—from 1638 to 1661—when the Eldership of the Church was most efficient and powerful, and bore a distinguished part in the deliverance of the country from civil and spiritual thraldom, and in raising the mass of the people (after making every allowance for serious defects and gross crimes, not unusual in the land) to a degree of religious knowledge, moral elevation, and patriotic devotedness, and that in a very short space of time, altogether unknown in the history of the world. It was a proud day for Scotland when sixteen Christian peers could be seen sitting as elders in her General Assembly at the same time. But Guthrie lived to see an unfavourable change. From 1649 to 1660, through the age of Cromwell, there was a partial decline owing to dissension among the ministers of the Church, and the presence of sectaries in the English army stationed in Scotland. It seems to have been from a wish to counteract this downward tendency that the following short treatise was written, and admirably is it fitted with

the Divine blessing to stir up office-bearers in the Church to the faithful discharge of their duty.

It is not necessary to say any thing of the character of the author. His violent death, like that of his divine Master, under the forms of law, was as cold-blooded a murder as was ever perpetrated. Charles II, with his profligate advisers, wished to strike a blow which should spread terror over Scotland. Hence, scarcely a year after the Restoration, first the noble marquis of Argyle, and then the not less morally noble James Guthrie, were basely butchered, by men whose character was so low and abandoned as justly to expose themselves to the severest punishment. The case of Guthrie is too well known to need any special notice. I may merely mention, that it is related in the unpublished Wodrow MSS. that he declared he never had sweeter communion with God than when, mixed up with cursing soldiers, he overheard his judges determining on the mode of carrying his sentence into effect, where his head and the different parts of his body were to be stuck up. Conversing with clerical friends some time before of besetting sins, it is related that Guthrie reckoned among *his* besetting sins “too eager a desire to die a violent death for Christ.” It is certain that his composure in the prospect of death was imperturbable, such as to surprise beholders accustomed to resolution, and to equal if not surpass the attainments of the bravest martial warriors.

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T R E A T I S E

O F

R U L I N G E L D E R S A N D D E A C O N S

I N W H I C H T H E S E T H I N G S W H I C H B E L O N G T O T H E
U N D E R S T A N D I N G O F T H E I R O F F I C E A N D D U T Y
A R E C L E A R L Y A N D S H O R T L Y S E T D O W N.

B Y A

M I N I S T E R O F T H E C H U R C H O F S C O T L A N D .

R E V I S E D A N D P U B L I S H E D B Y O R D E R O F T H E G E N E R A L
M E E T I N G O F M I N I S T E R S A N D E L D E R S O F T H I S C H U R C H .

"Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour."—
1 Tim. v, 17.

"They that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves
a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus."—
1 Tim. iii, 13.

THE PREFACE.

THE Lord, whose fire is in Zion, and whose furnace is in Jerusalem,¹ hath, in depths of his wisdom, spoken by terrible things in righteousness² against this nation, he hath brought us down wonderfully,³ and hath made our breach wide as the sea ; who can heal us ?⁴ Our bruise is incurable, and our wound is grievous, for the Lord hath wounded us with the wound of an enemy, with the chastisement of a cruel one, because our sins were encreased :⁵ he hath mingled a perverse spirit in the midst of us which causeth us to err in every work as a drunken man staggereth in his vomit,⁶ and we eat every man the flesh of his own arm ;⁷ for all this His anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still ; the yoke of our transgressions is bound by his hand, they are wreathed and come up upon our neck ;⁸ and in the day of our calamity He hath covered us with a cloud in his anger,⁹ that, like blind men in the dark, we grope for the wall,¹⁰ and cannot find either our sin or our duty. Some cry that there be many of our prophets who have not discovered our iniquity to turn away our captivity ; others complain that not a few of them have seen for us false burdens and causes of banishment : what shall we do whilst it is thus with us ? Surely it is meet to be said unto God, Show me why thou contendest with me.¹¹ I have borne chastisement, I will not offend any more. That which I see not, teach thou me ; if I have done iniquity, I will do no more,¹²

¹ Isaiah, xxxi, 9.

² Psalm lxv, 5.

³ Lam., i, 9.

⁴ Lam., ii, 13.

⁵ Jer., xxx, 12, 14.

⁶ Isaiah, xix, 14.

⁷ Isaiah, ix, 20.

⁸ Lam., i, 14.

⁹ Lam., ii, 1.

¹⁰ Isaiah,lix, 10.

¹¹ Job, x, 2.

¹² Job,xxxiv, 31, 32.

until the Lord shall reveal it unto us, and make us wise in heart to understand this,¹ and speak to us that we may declare it, for what the land mourns. It is fit that, in the things of the Lord's controversy, and of our duty whereto we have already attained, we walk by the same rule and mind the same things. I do suppose that all of us are of one mind in this, that our corrupt mixture in church members and church officers are one main cause why so much wrath is gone forth from the Lord against us and doth abide upon us. The Lord's design upon Scotland for a long time past seems to have been to purge his house, and as to have his ordinances pure so to have his people and his officers also pure.² I mean not of a higher pitch than the doctrine and policy of our church doth reach, because (I fear not to say it) the measuring line of the sanctuary hath been stretched over these to give unto them due Scripture dimensions concerning the qualifications of Church members and Church officers. If in these things our practice were agreeable to our rule we need not be ashamed, but might speak with our enemies in the gate, and answer him that reproacheth us. Our sin is, that being weighed in our own balance, we are found too light. How many church members are there in Scotland whom our church (if conscientiously wielded) would cut off as rotten. How many church officers whom that discipline would cast out as unsavoury salt: such have rejoiced in our pride and been haughty because of the Lord's holy mountain,³ but have not so zealously cared that holiness to the Lord might be engraven on all the pots of his house.⁴ We have boasted of a reformation of the ordinances, without seeking as really to reform church members according to the pattern thereof. Pure ordinances are indeed things precious and excellent, (and what soul among us that hath any measure of the true zeal of the Lord's house can behold the defacing of these, and not make it the matter of their lamentation,) yet these are but means subordinate to a more high and super-excellent end, to

¹ Jeremiah, ix, 12.-

² Ezek., xxiv, 13; Isa., i, 25; Ezek., xx, 38; Zeph., iii, 9.

³ Zephaniah, iii, 11.

⁴ Zechariah, xii, 20, 21.

wit, that we may thereby be brought with open face to behold as in a glass the glory of the Lord, and be changed into the same image from glory to glory even as by the Spirit of the Lord,¹ that we may all come unto the unity of the faith unto the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.² It is true that all the members of the church visible will not be living and lively stones in the Lord's temple, neither doth the rule of church constitution hold out or cast out all who are really not such ; but this is the great scope that all of us ought to level at, that all the Lord's people may be holy—that all who profess faith in Jesus Christ may walk as becomes the gospel of Jesus Christ;³ and how shall this be attained unless those who bear the vessels of the Lord, and to whom the charge of holy things be committed, be holy? The sons of Levi must be purified and purged as gold and silver before they offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness. When that is done, then are the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem pleasant unto the Lord.⁴ I acknowledge that we were once upon a fair way for purging the house of God in this land. They who interrupted us shall bear their burden ; but what was done in this thing was not more refreshing to gracious hearts than it was sorely repined at, and opposed by others, (a sin that provoked the Lord to stop the current of so rich a mercy,) therefore do many make haste again to intrude themselves upon the congregations whence they were justly cast out, and not a few amongst the people love to have it so, as though there were a conspiracy to return to Egypt and to build again the walls of Jericho and repair the ruins of Edom. I do also acknowledge it with thankfulness unto the great Shepherd of souls that there is a great company of gracious men amongst the officers of his church who walk in the ways of the Lord and keep his charge ; but there be also many that neither do so nor know how to do it—to say nothing of ministers. It is more than manifest that there is a generation of ignorant, slothful, earthly-minded men who bear the name of

¹ 2 Corinthians, iii, 18.

² Ephesians, iv, 13.

³ Psalm, xciii, 5 ; Philippians, xii, 27.

⁴ Malachi, iii, 2, 4.

elders and deacons in many congregations, and where such bear rule, what can be expected but that the people should perish for want of knowledge, and holiness be despised and lye in the dust, and congregations still abide in too swarthy a temper? If we might find grace in the Lord's sight, to be thoroughly convinced of this great church evil, whence many church evils flow, and be brought with some measure of sincerity to endeavour the remedy thereof, what a branch of hope might it be, that our reproach should be taken away and we become a people instructed in the way of the Lord, and walking to the praise and commendation of the Gospel, which is now evil spoken of, because of the ignorance and loose conversation of many among us. Therefore am I bold as pressed in spirit (albeit one of the weakest and most unworthy) to offer this little treatise, with an eye upon this end. And let me, without offence, beseech all the ministers, elders, deacons, congregations, presbyteries, and assemblies of this church in the bowels of the Lord Jesus Christ, yea, let me obtest them by the blood of the everlasting covenant, by their zeal for the Lord's honour, by the credit of the Gospel, by their love to souls, and by the fury of the Lord, which he hath caused to rest upon us,¹ because he purged us and we would not be purged—and as they desire the Lord should bring us again, and cause us to stand before him, and leave us a remnant and give us a nail in his holy place;² that they would each of them in their stations, endeavouring to take forth the precious from the vile,³ and purge the Lord's house in this land from corrupt officers and corrupt members; oh, will we not be made clean; when will it once be!⁴

¹ Ezekiel, xxiv, 13.

² Ezra, ix, 8.

³ Jeremiah, xv, 19.

⁴ Jeremiah, xiii, 27.

TO THE CHRISTIAN READER.

The inducements that persuaded me first to write this little treatise of Ruling Elders and Deacons were chiefly these: 1st. The sensible impression that the Lord hath made upon my spirit, as also, I know, upon the spirits of the godly of the land, of the great prejudice that comes to this poor Church by a multitude of men in these offices, who neither know their duty nor make conscience to perform it. 2nd. The vindicating the doctrine of our Church concerning these church officers, that the mouths of such who speak evil may be stopped, and others who stumble may be satisfied. 3rd. The pressing desire of brethren, ministers, and elders in the Presbytery and congregation, where the Lord hath set me, all which did receive some spirit and life, when I found my name among those to whom the General Assembly of this Church did commit and recommend this work long ago.

I have endeavoured to handle it with as much plainness and evidence of truth and as shortly without wronging of the matter as I could. It is not unlikely but some may think I have done no great business, because I have brought no new thing. I acknowledge that it is so; what I have said is for the matter, I trust, and in many things for the words too, the doctrine of the Scriptures, and of Protestant divines, and of our Church in the acts and policy thereof. I have put together in one, and digested into some method what was lying scattered before, that these who either could not or would not be at the pains to search for such things may now have them at their hand. Others may look upon this treatise as not plain enough or as not so exact, full, and perfect as it ought to be; with these I shall not contend; I have done what I could, at least what I conceived best in order to the ends I propounded to myself. If others shall find favour of the Lord to do better, I shall bless his name on their behalf, and receive and make use of their pains

with thankfulness. And some may haply think that there is here too much laid upon Ruling Elders, more than they shall be able or willing to undertake; yea, more than the Lord doth require of them, most of the things that are mentioned by us being incumbent to Ministers rather than to Elders. It is true what is said of the Elder's duty is also the duty of Ministers, for whatsoever the Elder ought to do by virtue of his calling, that also ought the Minister to do and somewhat more; but so far as we know, nothing is spoken here of the Elder that doth not belong to him. If through ignorance or want of ability or neglect or custom Elders have not done these things, it is that which ought to be helped—it is now high time for them to awake and to know and own and follow their duty, and for the church of God in Scotland to know how much she hath smarted under the hands of ignorant and slothful, yea, and scandalous men; we would not always satisfy ourselves with disguised and histrionical men puffed up with titles¹ or with idols, dead in sins, to be Elders; but would seek after holy men, who being endued with faith in God and walking in his obedience, God authorising them, and the Church his spouse choosing them and calling them, undertake the government thereof, that they may labour to the conversation and edification of the same in Christ—neither needs the qualification or multitude or difficulties of the particulars here spoken of to discourage or scare any. It is not so much the measure as the truth of the thing that is to be looked at. We have set down what a Ruling Elder ought to be in regard of the whole extent of his charge, sundry particulars whereof the most part of Ruling Elders are seldom called to exercise, and if they be in some measure fitted for these parts of the charge which God calls them to exercise, and follow the same with singleness of heart, that they may believe that they shall be assisted and accepted of God in Christ Jesus. The employment is not theirs, but the Lord's, from whom they may expect both their furniture and also their reward. Let them arise and be doing and the Lord shall be with them. .

¹ Junius, Eccles. I. 2, c. 3.

A SHORT TREATISE
OF
RULING ELDERS.

CHAPTER I.

OF THEIR NAMES.

WHAT is necessary to be understood concerning Ruling Elders may be taken up in the explanation of these four: 1st. Their name; 2nd. Their institution; 3rd. Their calling; 4th. Their qualification and duty.

The word elder in the Scripture doth signify divers things.¹ 1st. It signifies old men or men come to age.² Rebuke not an Elder, but entreat him as a father, and the younger men as brethren. 2nd. It signifies those who have lived in the times of old.³ Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the Elders. 3rd. It is taken for honourable and worthy men. The Lord of hosts doth take away from Jerusalem and Judah the prudent and the ancient.⁴ It is the name of a spiritual officer in the house of God. And when they had ordained them Elders in every city.⁵ In this last signification it is taken in this place, for these who bear rule in the house of God, who are called Elders because of the knowledge, gifts, experience, prudence, and gravity wherewith they ought to be endued. The officers in the house of God, who in the Scriptures are called by the name of Elders,⁶ are of several sorts, preaching

¹ The Second Book of Discipline, 6th sect. Assertion of the government of the Church of Scotland, 1st part, chap. 1. (This able work is understood to have proceeded from the pen of the celebrated Rev. George Gillespie of Edinburgh, 1641.)—Editor.

² 1 Tim. v, 1. ³ Mat. xv, 2. ⁴ Isa. iii, 2. ⁵ Acts, xiv, 23.

⁶ The 2nd Book of Discipline, chap. vi, Sect. 1.

Elders or Ministers, teaching Elders or Doctors, and ruling and governing Elders—all these three are often-times in the New Testament comprised under the general name of Elders.¹ It is the Ruling Elder² whom we have now to do with; who is so called not because the power of ruling and governing the church belongs to him alone, for it also belongs to the preaching and teaching Elders, or to the Ministers and Doctors. But because to rule and govern is the principal and chief part of his charge and employment, it is the highest act of his office. It is not competent for him to preach—that belongs to the Pastor or Minister; nor to teach—that belongs to the Doctor: but his office is combined within the compass of ruling and governing the church; and therefore he is called the governing or ruling Elder. The apostle, in the Epistle to the Romans,³ calleth him, him that ruleth; and he calls them governments,⁴ putting the abstract for the concrete, governments for governors. Thus then we have the proper or right names of these church officers, which seem to correct a two-fold mistake. The first, of these who either out of ignorance or disdain do call them *lay elders*, as if they were a part of the people only, and not to be reckoned amongst the officers of the Lord's house, whom the Popish church, in their pride, and others following them, calls “the clergy,” that is, the Lord's inheritance, in opposition to “the laity” or people, whom they look upon as base and much inferior to the other in worth and excellency, whereas all the Lord's people are his portion and the lot of his inheritance.⁵ The second mistake is of these who do call these only ruling Elders who sit in Presbyteries, Synods, and General Assemblies, allowing to others the name of Elders, but not of ruling Elders. But every Elder in the Lord's house is a ruling Elder,⁶ because the power and exercise of rule and government belongs to every Elder, though some of them upon especial occasions be called to a more eminent exercise of it than others.

¹ Acts, xv, 6, 22; xx, 17; 1 Pet. v.

² The Second Book of Discipline, chap. vi, sect. 3.

³ Rom. xii, 8.

⁴ 1 Cor. xii, 28.

⁵ Deut. xxxii, 9;

⁶ 1 Pet. v, 3.

CHAPTER II.

OF THE INSTITUTION OF RULING ELDERS.

THE institution of the office of Ruling Elders is divine,¹ it is not an ordinance of man but of God. The Lord Jesus, upon whose shoulder the government is, and who is faithful in all his house, hath in his eternal wisdom thought fit to appoint such an officer in his house for the right and orderly governing thereof. It is true that by the sloth, or rather by the pride of teachers, whilst they alone would seem to be somewhat, and by the policy of Satan and inadvertance of the church, these officers were for many ages together out of use in the Christian church. But certain it is, that both the Jewish synagogue and afterwards the Christian church had seniores or elders, without whose counsel nothing was done in the church. That the Jewish church had such, appears from 2 Chron. xix, 8; Jer. xxix, 1; Mat. xvi, 21—23, 26, 57, 59; Acts iv, 5;² and that the Christian church also had them in the primitive and purest times thereof, appears from the testimony of ancient writers, as may be found by those who will take pains to search into these things. But we have a more sure word for the divine institution of Elders in the Christian church than any testimony of man, to wit the testimony of God in the Scriptures of the New Testament.

The first place of Scripture is, “Having then gifts differing according to the grace which is given us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; or ministry, let us wait on our ministering; or he that teacheth, on teaching; or he that exhorteth, on exhortation; he that gives, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness.”³ In which text the apostle doth at first comprehend all the several kinds of ordinary standing

¹ The Second Book of Discipline, chap. vi, sect. 2.

² Ambrose com. on 1 Tim. v, 1; Tert. in his 34th ch. of Apol. Basil. Mag. com. cn Isa. iii, 2. Hier. on that same place, Aug. Ep. 137, Greg. con. Cels. lib. 3, Aug. lib. 3, contra, Crescan, ch. 56.

³ Rom. xii, 6—8.

officers in the church of God under two general heads; to wit, *Prophecy*, whereby is meant the ordinary faculty of right understanding and expounding the Scriptures, and *Ministry*, under which is comprehended all other church officers and employments; to each of these the apostle addeth their general duties, namely; that he who prophesieth should do it according to the proportion of faith, that is, according to the measure of knowledge of the word of faith that he hath received of God: and he that ministers, let him wait on his ministering, that is, let him not do it negligently or slothfully, but faithfully and diligently. Then he subdivides these two generals into the special offices contained under them. He divides him that prophesieth into him that teacheth, and him that exhorteth, or into the doctor to whom the work of teaching or instructing belongs, and the pastor to whom the word of exhortation is competent. Under him that ministereth, he comprehends first him that giveth, by whom is meant the deacon, who is appointed for the supply of the poor; secondly, him that ruleth by whom can be meant no other than the Ruling Elder. Seeing an ordinary ruling officer in the church, who is different from the Pastor and Teacher, is here spoken of by the apostle.

The second place of Scripture that proves the office of Ruling Elders is, "And God hath set some in the church, first, apostles; secondarily, prophets; thirdly, teachers; afterwards miracles; then gifts of healing, helps, governments, diversities of tongues."¹ Some of the bibles of the late English translation read "helps in governments," but cross to the text in the original language that bears "helps, governments," as two distinct things, and therefore in other editions of that translation this is helped. In this text the apostle reckons several officers of the church: some extraordinary, which were to continue but for a season, such as apostles, prophets, powers, or miracles, gifts of healing, kinds of tongues; some ordinary; which were to continue in the church to the end of the world, and these are teachers or the ordinary church officers who are exercised in the word: helps, that is, the deacons who are appointed for the

¹ 1 Cor. xii, 28.

help and relief of the poor; and governments, that is, the governing and Ruling Elders; for it is clear from the words that the apostle, by governments, doth mean, a church officer whom God hath set in his church for ruling and governing thereof. Now this cannot be any other of the church officers, for these he hath named besides, and therefore it remains that it is the Ruling Elder.

The third place of Scripture is; “Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine.”¹—Which text doth hold forth and distinguish two sort of Elders in the church to whom the Lord Jesus hath committed the power of ruling: One sort who do also labour in the word and doctrine, namely, pastors and teachers; another sort who do only rule, and doing it well are accounted worthy of double honour; and these are the Ruling Elders of whom we speak.

From this, that the office of the Ruling Elder is of divine institution,² we gather these conclusions; first, that it is not a thing arbitrary and indifferent for such to wait upon their charge; yea or no as they please, or as their attendance may contribute for their own or their friend’s particular (advantage), which is the custom of too many Elders; but that they are bound in conscience diligently to attend and follow the duties thereof, whether they be such as they owe to the several members of the congregation, or the keeping of Session, or Presbytery, and other assemblies of the church, when they are called and desired thereto.

Secondly, that Elders ought to do their office not formally and hypocritically for the fashion only, but sincerely and honestly as in the sight of God, by whom they are called unto this holy calling, and to whom they must render an account for their discharge of this great trust.

Thirdly, they ought not to domineer over their fellow-brethren and Elders, but to carry themselves humbly and serviceably, as those who are appointed of the Lord Jesus for ministering unto, and edifying of his body, the church.

¹ 1 Tim. v, 17. ² Second Book of Discipline, chap. iii, sect. 13—16. Assertion of the government of the Church of Scotland, part i, chap. 3, pp. 11, 17.

Fourthly, that they ought to carry themselves with that authority, holiness, gravity, and prudence, that becomes those who are called of God to bear rule in his house.

Fifthly, that Elders, once lawfully called to the office and having gifts from God meet to exercise the same, unless they be removed therefrom, because of miscarriages, are still Elders, though haply in congregations where many qualified men may be found, some may be permitted for a time to cease from the exercise of the charge,¹ and others be put in their room, as was among the Levites under the law in serving in the temple by courses.

Sixthly, that people ought to obey such as those who have the rule over them, and to submit themselves, because they wait for their souls as they that must give an account, that they may do it with joy and not with grief.² Yea, they should know them as these who are over them in the Lord, and do admonish them and esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake.³

CHAPTER III.

OF THE VOCATION OR CALLING OF RULING ELDERS.⁴

As no man is to intrude into any employment without a lawful calling, so much less ought any man to intrude himself without a calling into any sacred function in the house of God.⁵ Therefore before any take upon him to exercise the office of Ruling Elder, he ought to be lawfully called thereunto.⁶ This calling is inward or outward: the inward calling is the testimony of a good conscience concerning some measure of ability and gifts for the charge, and a sincere and honest inclination and purpose to employ these gifts for the honour of God, the advancement of the kingdom of Jesus Christ, and the good of souls. The outward call-

¹ 2nd Book of Discipline, chap. iii.

² Heb. xiii, 17.

³ 1 Thes. v, 12, 13.

⁴ 2nd Book of Discipline, chap. iii.

⁵ Heb. v, 4.

⁶ 2nd Book of Discipline, chap. iii.

ing is to be after the same manner with that of other church officers; and it stands in their election and in the trial of their carriage, gifts, and admission to the charge. The Election is to be made by the congregation wherein they are to bear charge.¹ That it may be gone about in the more orderly way, it is fit that a nomination be made by the minister and eldership of the congregation of the persons fittest and best qualified for the employment, and that the names of the persons nominated by them be publicly intimated to the congregation; and they desired, in case of their not being satisfied, as having exception, or knowing others better qualified, to represent the same to the minister and eldership. If there be no eldership in the congregation, a nomination may be made either by the Presbytery or by the most judicious and godly members of the congregation, particularly masters of families, together with the minister, or one or more ministers of the Presbytery, in case the congregation are in want of a minister. The trial² is to be by the minister and eldership of the congregation, or in case of the want of these, by the Presbytery. And they are to be tried both in regard of their conversation—that it be blameless and holy—and also in regard of their knowledge and experience in the things of God and of the affairs of his house, and of their ability and prudence for government. It is true that the trial of Elders, in their knowledge and gifts required for their charge, hath not been much in use in this church, it being taken for granted that conscience would be made in making choice of such as had knowledge, and were able and fit, or that if any ignorant, or not able and fitted, were nominated, that some of the congregation, upon the intimation of their names, would except against them; but by this means it hath come to pass that many ignorant and unqualified men have been admitted Elders in many congregations to the great detriment of religion and no small reproach to our church. The Apostle, speaking of Deacons, which

¹ Acts, vi, 3, 5; xiv, 23; Second Book of Discipline, viii, touching the election of Elders and Deacons.

² First Book of Discipline, 8th head.

is the lowest rank of the officer of the church, requires that these also first be proved: then let them use the office of a Deacon, being found blameless.¹ And the same reasons and grounds that plead for the trial of a minister plead also for the trial of Elders, in a way suitable to the qualifications required in them.²

Their admission is to be by the minister of the congregation, or one appointed by the Presbytery, in the presence of the whole congregation, with the preaching of the word concerning their duty, and with prayer and humiliation concerning the spirit of their calling, to be poured out upon them, and that the pleasure of the Lord may prosper in their hands. At which time they are solemnly to engage themselves before the Lord, to be faithful and diligent and watchful over the flock committed to their charge, and in all the duties of that holy and honourable employment; and the people are also to engage themselves to obey them and to submit themselves to them in the Lord, and to honour them and highly esteem them in love for their works' sake.

CHAPTER IV.

OF THE DUTIES OF RULING ELDERS.

THE duties of a Ruling Elder are of two sorts, some that are personal, and relate to his conversation as a Christian, others that are official, and relate to his ruling as an office-bearer in the house of God.³ His personal qualifications, or the duties of his conversation, are the same with those which the apostle requires in the conversation of a minister.⁴ In which scriptures, under the name of *επισκοπος*, or an overseer, he comprehends all these officers who have the oversight and charge of souls,⁵

¹ 1 Timothy, iii, 10.

² See the manner of electing and admitting Ministers and Elders prefixed to the old Psalm Book.

³ First Book of Discipline, 8th head; Second Book of Discipline, chap. vi. ⁴ 1 Tim. iii, 2—7; vi, 11; Tit. i, 6—8.

⁵ The manner of electing of Ministers and Elders, Jun. Eccles. lib. ii, chap. iii.

and sets down what manner of persons he would have them to be in regard of their conversation and carriage. I shall speak of these things with application to the Ruling Elder. That the Ruling Elder ought to be of a blameless and Christian conversation is above question, but that it may be more distinctly known what the Holy Ghost requires of such in regard of their conversation, I shall from these scriptures show, 1st, What the apostle would have them not to be—2nd, What he would have them to be. The things of the first sort are these, 1st. A Ruling Elder must not be given to wine, they must not be lovers or followers of strong drink, nor debased in riot and excess, nor tipple away time in alehouses and taverns. 2nd. He must not be a striker nor a brawler, nor given to quarrelling and contentions. 3rd. He must not be covetous nor greedy of filthy lucre; for the love of money is the root of all evil, which while some covet after, they err from the faith and pierce themselves through with many sorrows. 4th. He must not be a novice, or one newly come to the faith, lest he be puffed up with pride, and fall into the condemnation of the devil. The spirits of novices are not yet well ballasted, nor brought low enough by the frequent exercises of the cross, and so come to be more easily puffed up; therefore there is need that he be an exercised soldier of Jesus Christ, and one who by experience is taught to know the wiles of the devil, and is able to endure hardness. 5th. He must not be self-willed, adhering pertinaciously and without reason to his own judgment, and refusing to hearken to the judgment of his brethren, though sound and wholesome. 6th. He must not be soon angry, whether upon real or conceived causes of provocation.

The things of the second sort be these: 1st. He must be blameless, that is, one who walks without offence towards God and men. 2nd. If married, he must be the husband of one wife: such a one who shuns all unlawful lusts, satisfying himself with and keeping himself within the bounds of the remedy provided of God. 3rd. He must be vigilant, watchful over his own soul, that no temptation prevail upon him, watchful unto every good duty, and to take hold

of every opportunity of well-doing. 4th. He must be sober and temperate and of a sound and humble mind, moderating his own appetite and affections, and satisfying himself with a moderate use of the creatures and of the things of this world. 5th. He must be of a good behaviour or modest, of a grave and staid, yet of an affable and courteous carriage, neither light and vain to the losing of his authority and rendering himself contemptible, nor sullen and self-pleasing to the discouraging and scaring away of the flock by his needless distance and austerity. 6th. Given to hospitality, ready to receive strangers to his house, especially the poor and those who are of the household of faith. 7th. Apt to teach, that is, a man of knowledge, and able to instruct others, one who hath a ready and willing mind to teach others, which is not so meant as if it were requisite for the Ruling Elder to be endued with the gifts of exhortation and instruction competent to the Pastor and Teacher, or that he may and ought to employ himself therein, but of that fitness and ability to teach that is competent to his calling, which he must be ready and willing to exercise so far as belongs thereto. 8th. Moderate in the original language, *επιτακτικός*, rendered patient.¹ Not rigorous, nor exacting the height of the law in his dealing, but in his own particular of a condescending nature, and remitting something of strict justice. 9th. Patient, one who without wearying waits on his duty, notwithstanding difficulties, and doth bear the delays, untractableness, and injuries of others. 10th. One who rules well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; to which the apostle adds this reason, "if a man know not how to rule his own house how shall he take a care of the church of God?"² The church of God is of a larger extent than one family, and the duties to be performed in it be of greater eminency and difficulty, and require more skill, wisdom, and courage than these that are to be performed in a family. The ruling well of his own house doth import not only ability for doing of it, but also that he make conscience of and actually perform these duties that are required for the right and well ordering of a Christian family, to teach

¹ 1 Tim. iii.

² 1 Tim. iii, 5.

and instruct his children and servants in the knowledge of God, to take care of their sanctifying the Lord's day, of their profiting in godliness, of their seeking of God, and of their ordering their conversation aright, to read the Scriptures, sing psalms, pray in the family, and to exhort, admonish, rebuke, and comfort all that are of his household, as their condition doth require ; for if these duties lye upon all masters of families who profess the Gospel, then in a special way upon Elders, who are appointed to stir up and go before others in the performance thereof. 11th. A lover of good men, one whose soul cleaves to those who fear God, having such in estimation above all others, cherishing them and conversing ordinarily and familiarly with them. 12th. He must be just, one who is straight and upright in all his dealings among men, deceiving no man, defrauding no man, withholding nothing from any man that is due to him, but giving to every man his own. 13th, Holy ; careful to express the life of religion and power of godliness in all his conversation. 14th, He must be one who holds fast the faithful word that he hath been taught, one who is stable in the faith, holding fast the truth of God, without wavering or turning aside to error. Lastly, He must be one who hath a good report of those who are without, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil, that is, he must be such a one whose blameless conversation and sober and Christian walking doth extort a testimony even from those who know not God, and who doth by well-doing put to silence the ignorance of foolish men, that if any speak evil of him, as of an evil doer, they may be ashamed who speak falsely against his good conversation in Christ. The apostle comprehends all these summarily in two sentences. "Be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity."¹ "But thou, O man of God, flee these things ; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness."²

¹ 1 Tim. iv, 12.

² 1 Tim. vi, 11.

CHAPTER V.

OF THE DUTIES OF THEIR CALLING WHICH ARE MORE PRIVATE.

THE duties of their calling are those that belong to their watching over and ruling of the flock,¹ and they be of two sorts; some that they are to perform by themselves alone, and so may be called more private duties; others that they are to perform jointly² with the rest of the overseers of the house of God, and may be called more public. The duties of their calling that be more private³ are all these that private Christians are bound to perform each of them unto another, by the law of charity and love, and these are, 1st, To instruct one another;⁴ 2ndly, To exhort and stir up one another to provoke unto love and good works;⁵ 3rdly, To admonish and rebuke one another,⁶ first, privately, and if they will not hearken, then before witnesses, and if yet they will not hearken, then to tell the church, and if they will not hear the church then let them be unto us as heathens and publicans;⁷ 4thly, To comfort the afflicted, and support the weak;⁸ 5thly, To restore those that are fallen;⁹ 6thly, To reconcile those who are at variance;¹⁰ 7thly, To pray one for another;¹¹ 8thly, To visit the sick and those who are in bonds and distress.¹² All these duties Elders are to perform to the several members of the congregation by virtue of their calling. The Scriptures do expressly mention some of them as incumbent unto them, to wit, admonishing those over whom God hath set them;¹³ visiting and praying over the sick;¹⁴ feeding the flock by instruction, exhortation,

¹ First Book of Discipline, 8th Head; Second Book of Discip. 6th Chap.

² Assertion of the Government of the Church of Scotland, Part I; Chap. ii, Part I, p. 15.

³ Jun. Eccles. lib. ii, cap. 3rd, p. 107.

⁴ Job, iv, 29; Acts, xviii, 26.

⁵ Heb. x, 24, 25.

⁶ Lev. xix, 17.

⁷ Matth. xviii, 15—17.

⁸ 1 Thess. v, 11.

⁹ Gal. vi, 1.

¹⁰ Matth. v, 9.

¹¹ Jude, 10.

¹² Matth. xxv, 36,

¹³ 1 Thess. v, 12.

¹⁴ James, v, 14.

rebuke, and comfort, in such a way as is competent to their station.¹ The rest we may warrantably gather by analogy and proportion from these. If private Christians be obliged thereto, much more are Christian elders, who have the charge of souls in a special way, obliged thereto. These things are well expressed in the 6th Chap. of the Second Book of Discipline. As the Pastors and Doctors (say they) should be diligent in teaching and sowing the seed of the word,² so the Elders should be careful in seeking of the fruit of the same of the people. It appertains to them to assist the Pastor in examination of them that come to the Lord's table. In visiting the sick they should cause the Acts of the Assemblies, as well particular as general, to be put in execution carefully; they should be diligent to admonish all men of their duty according to the rule of the evangelist; things that they cannot correct by private admonition they should bring to the Eldership.

From what hath been said concerning these duties of Ruling Elders these three things follow: 1st, That they ought to be men of such ability as are in some measure able to instruct, exhort, admonish, rebuke, comfort, pray, and do these duties now mentioned. 2ndly, That is needful for them not only to have some measure of ability for these things, but also to have some measure of dexterity, wisdom, experience, tenderness, in following the same. 3rdly, That they be well acquainted with the condition of the congregation and the members thereof, and therefore be careful to observe their carriage, and frequently to visit and take inspection of families, that they may instruct the ignorant, exhort the negligent, admonish the slothful, and rebuke those who walk disorderly; comfort the afflicted, establish those who waver; visit the sick, encourage those who do well, and see piety and godliness promoted in families, and every one edifying another in love, walking in the fear of the Lord and comfort of the Holy Ghost.

¹ Acts, xx, 28.

² Second Book of Discipline, Chap. vi.

CHAPTER VI.

OF THOSE DUTIES WHICH ARE MORE PUBLIC, AND WHICH THEY ARE TO PERFORM JOINTLY WITH OTHERS.

THE duties of Elders which are more public, and which they are to perform jointly with others,¹ are those which lye upon them in the assemblies or courts of the Church, which are made up of preaching Elders, teaching Elders, and Ruling Elders. These assemblies are in our church of four sorts: either they are of the Elders of particular congregations, which is the Church-session, or of the Elders of more congregations than one lying near together, which is the Presbytery, or of the elders of more presbyteries than one, which is the Provincial Synod, or of the Elders' Commissioners from all the presbyteries in the land, which is the General or National Assembly. To these we may add a fifth sort, to wit, that which is made up of Elders from all or divers nations professing the faith of Jesus Christ.

Whilst we speak of Elders, of which the assemblies of the Church are made up, we mean all sorts of Elders — Ministers, Doctors, and Ruling Elders. It is true that in the congregations of our church, because of the want of maintenance, there be few or no Doctors or teaching Elders, distinct from Pastors or Ministers, * who perform the duties both of the preaching Elder and of the teaching Elder, only in the schools of divinity are such. In all assemblies of the Church,² Ruling Elders, being thereto rightly called, have power to sit, write, debate, vote, and conclude in all matters that are handled therein.³ The things which are handled in the assemblies of the Church be either matters of faith, matters of order, matters of discipline, or that

¹ First Book of Discipline, 8th Head; Second Book, 6th Chap. The office and duties of Elders prefixed to the Psalm Book.

² Second Book of Discipline, chaps. 6 and 7.

³ Acts, xv, 2, and vi, 22, 23.

which concerneth the sending of church officers, according to which they have a fourfold power.¹ 1st, That which is called Dogmatic, whereby they judge of truth and error in points of doctrine, according to the word of God only. 2nd, That which is called Diatactic, by which they discern and judge of the circumstances of those things that belong to the worship of God, as times, places, persons, and all such particulars in ecclesiastic affairs as are not determined in the word, according to the general rules thereof, concerning order and decency, avoiding of scandal, doing all to the glory of God, and to the edifying of the Church. 3rd, That which is Critic or Corrective, by which censures are exercised upon the scandalous and obstinate, and such as are penitent again admitted to the ordinances, fellowship, and society of the Church. 4th, That which is called Exusiastic, by virtue of which they send, authorise, and give power to Church officers to serve in the house of God. All these assemblies are not to exercise all these powers, but to keep themselves within due bounds, the inferior leaving these things that are of more common concernment to the superior; but in all those powers Ruling Elders have a share, and do put forth the same in exercise according to the measure that belongs to the assembly whereof they are members.² Howbeit the execution of some decrees of the Church Assemblies—such as the imposition of hands, the pronouncing the sentence of excommunication, the receiving of penitents, the intimation of the deposition of ministers, and such like, do belong to ministers alone.

These being the duties and powers of Ruling Elders in the assemblies of the church, it is requisite that they be indued with such abilities and qualifications as are needful for the exercising thereof. But because all Ruling Elders are not always called to sit in all these assemblies, but one from every Session sufficeth to the Presbytery and provincial Synods, and a few from every Presbytery and from greater congregations or Burghs therein, to the General Assembly, as also a few from the whole Church throughout the land to a more universal assembly, therefore, though it is to be wished

First Book of Discipline, chap. 7.

² Acts, xv, 6, 22, 23.

and endeavoured that all Elders may have due qualifications for all these things, and though special care is to be taken everywhere to choose the most qualified, yet, in particular congregations, men may be chosen Elders who have not such a measure of all these qualifications, they being otherwise men of a blameless and Christian conversation, and having such a measure of knowledge and prudence as is fit for governing that congregation and judging of the things that are handled in the session thereof, which for the most part are matters of scandal, and trying and admitting of penitents; but if there be any who are not of a blameless and Christian conversation, and have not some measure of those qualifications required by the word of God in a Ruling Elder, no congregation ought to choose any such, nor any Session or Presbytery to admit them to the charge, for it is not seemly that the servants of corruption should have authority to judge in the Kirk of God, and if any such have been admitted, they are to endeavour the removal of them, as they would not partake of their sin, and be found guilty before the Lord of the blood of souls, which cannot but suffer prejudice through negligence or ill guiding of such men.

CHAPTER VII.

OF THE DUTY OF ELDERS IN CENSURING SCANDALS AND SCANDALOUS PERSONS, AND RECEIVING OF PENITENTS.

BECAUSE the government and duty of elders in congregations lies for most part in censuring scandals and scandalous persons, and trying and admitting of penitents, therefore it is fit to speak somewhat of their right way of following their duty in these things,—1st, For the persons about whom their censures are to be exercised, it is all the members of the congregation indifferently and impartially, without respect of persons, the rich as well as the poor, the high as well as the low, their friends, kinsmen, alliance, neighbours, and acquaintance, as well as others.¹ 2nd. The word sharply reproves those who have

¹ First Book of Discipline, concerning persons subject to Discipline, Second Book of Discipline, chaps. i and vii.

the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ the Lord of glory with respect of persons, by preferring the rich to the poor, and Solomon says that divers weights and measures are an abomination to the Lord ; must it not then be worthy of rebuke to have the censures of our Lord Jesus with respect of persons, and to weigh the rich and the poor, the high and the low, in divers balances, by taking notice of the one and passing by the other. 3rd. It is incumbent on them to exercise their power not only over the people of the congregation, but also over those of their own number. As all Christians, so they in a special way who are to be followers in the work of the Lord, ought to consider and admonish one another, and if any of them be found negligent or insufficient, or do in anything miscarry to the offence of the Gospel and blaming of the eldership, he is to be censured by the minister or ministers and the rest of the elders as the degree of his offence doth require.¹ The Apostle Paul² gives charge to all elders to take heed to themselves, as well as to the flock over which the Holy Ghost hath made them overseers. 4th. As all sorts of scandalous persons, whether in the congregation or amongst themselves, so all sorts of scandals and offences are to be taken notice of by them. The apostle, 2 Thess. iii, 6, commands that we withdraw from every brother that walketh disorderly and amongst disorderly walkers he doth, (verse 11,) reckon idle persons who do no work at all but are busy bodies ; intimating to us that even these scandals and disorders which are by many little taken notice of and looked upon as no faults, ought to be taken notice of by the Church, that all her members may walk honestly and as it becomes the gospel of Jesus Christ. The acts of our Church do appoint that whatsoever it be that might spot the Christian congregation ought not to escape either admonitions or censures ; so in the order of ecclesiastic discipline, 1567. Two great neglects there be that by ignorance or custom have crept in among Elders in many congregations. 1st. That they do not take notice of the omission of duties

¹ First Book of Discipline and Head. The weekly assembling of Ministers, Elders, and Deacon prefixed to the old Psalms.

² Acts, xx, 28.

as the commission of faults: as, for instance,—If there be any member of the congregation who lives idly and waits not upon his calling, who is not given to prayer, who is not charitable to the poor, who waits not upon the public ordinances, if there be any master of a family who prays not in his family, who does not bring up his children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord; or, 2nd. That they do not take notice of the commission of faults, and scandals of all sorts, but of some few only, such as fornication, adultery, and profaning of the Lord's day, and suffering many others, such as tippling, drunkenness, filthy communication, lying, cursing, swearing, oppression, reproaching of piety, and godlessness, &c., to pass without observation. 3rd. Elders are to take heed that they bring in no civil questions and debates before the Assemblies of the Church, and that they do not use nor inflict any civil mullet or punishment upon persons convicted of scandal, these being proper to the civil magistrate,¹ — the kingdom of Jesus Christ, and the censures thereof, being spiritual and not of this world.² 4th. In the taking notice of offenders they are to observe this order: If the offence be private and known to but a few, then they are, in the first place, to admonish the offender privately; and if he hearken to the admonition and amend, it needs go no farther, nor be delated to the Church: If he does not hearken nor amend, then is the elder to take with him some of his brethren and to admonish the offender before witnesses, and if he hearken the Church needs not be acquainted therewith, but, if he despise this second admonition then is he to be delated by the Elder to the Church that he may be called before the Session and convicted and censured by them.³ This is the order commanded and prescribed by Jesus Christ.⁴ If the offence be public and open, then is the offender, without such previous admonition, to be delated to the Session, that, according to the Apostle's rule,⁵ “They that sin (meaning openly) may be rebuked

¹ First Book of Discipline, chap. vii, sect. 6. ² John, xviii, 36.

³ The order of Ecclesiastic Discipline appointed by the Assembly 1567, and in the Order of Excommunication commanded to be printed by the Assembly 1571.¹

⁴ Matthew, xviii, 15—17.

⁵ 1 Timothy, v, 20.

before all, that others may fear."¹ 5th. In these delations they are to take heed that they do not upon every rumour and jealousy or suspicion bring men to be questioned publicly as scandalous walkers, but first to be careful to make diligent and prudent inquiry about the truth of the matter, and to see if it can be proven by witnesses, or that the scandal thereof be common and flagrant, or attended with frequent likelihoods and presumptions of truth, before they bring it in public, that so it may appear to the congregation and to the party themselves that they are not questioned and challenged without cause. In the matter of delation and censure they are in the fear of God and in the simplicity and sincerity of their hearts to take heed that fear or favour or solicitations or threatenings or gifts or bribes do not make them pass by or wink at the fault of any, and that passion or malice or private quarrels and particulars make them not to delate or rip up or censure the miscarriage of any, and that they carry with all tenderness and compassion and moderation towards the offender, that they may approve themselves to his conscience ; that nothing puts them on to delate him and proceed against him but the conscience of duty and a desire to gain his soul, and to purge the Church of scandals.² It is a high provocation before the Lord for a Church officer to abuse the power given him of God, for edifying his body the Church unto the satisfying of his own passions and corrupt affections. 6th. They are to take heed that they do not use the censures of the Church as a bodily punishment or penance to satisfy for sin, but a spiritual medicine for humbling and gaining of the soul ; all church censures, even excommunication itself, which is the most terrible and destroying-like censure, being ordained of God for this end.³ The apostle commands to deliver the incestuous person to Satan, not that he may satisfy for his sin, but that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus Christ. The word *satisfaction* may admit of a tolerable construction in church censures, in order to the removing of the scandal before men ; but this being so much abused in the popish church,

¹ Second Book of Discipline, chap. vi, sect. 12.

² Galatians, vi, 1; 2 Corinthians, iv, 2.

³ 1 Cor. x, 5.

and the hearts of men being so prone to turn true gospel repentance to a mere legal penance, and to conceive that by mere outward submission and obedience to the censures of the Church, the guilt of their sin is done away before God, therefore Elders should carefully shun every thing that may give occasion to the fostering this pernicious opinion, and take pains to instruct offenders in the true nature and ends of the censures of the Kirk. 7th. A great part of the Elder's work is to travail and take pains with scandalous persons, who are now convicted¹—to bring them to repentance by seasonable and frequent conference—instruction, exhorting, and admonishing them, until they perceive some measure of true and earnest humiliation wrought in them for their sin, and they fitted to evidence and declare the same in public before the congregation, that so the scandal may be removed. 8th. They are not to desire or appoint any to profess repentance before the congregation, until the signs of repentance appear in them. The incestuous Corinthian sorrowed exceedingly before the apostle did any thing concerning the receiving of him. And the discipline of our Church appoints Ministers and Elders sharply to examine those who offer themselves to repentance what fear and terror they have of God's judgments, what hatred of sin and sorrow for the same, and what sense and feeling they have of God's mercies—the which, if they be ignorant, they ought diligently to be instructed; for it is (say they) but a mocking to put such to public repentance who neither understand "what sin is, what repentance is, what grace is, nor by whom God's mercies and favours are purchased? And that after he is instructed in these things, and brought to have some taste of God's judgments, especially of his mercies in Jesus Christ, he may be presented before the public church. These things are set down in the form and order of public repentance, appointed by the Assembly 1567.

Lastly, When the signs and evidences of true and unfeigned repentance do appear in those who have offended, Elders should show themselves ready and wil-

¹ The form and order of public repentance prefixed to the old Psalm Book.

ling to receive them with all tenderness and compassion, and to forgive and comfort them, and confirm their love towards them.¹ The number of elders in every congregation cannot be well limited or determined ; but it is to be more or less according to the quantity of the congregation, and necessities and condition of the people, and as men qualified and fit for the charge can be found. It hath been an evil custom in some congregations, that rather than they would want any of their wonted number they would choose unqualified men ; and that in several congregations the office of Elder hath been given to those of the richer and higher sort, as due to such (though unhappily of no experience in the things of Jesus Christ, and in many things of an un-tender and blameworthy conversation,) because of their condition in the world, or conceiving that their secular power and credit was the best means to promote the kingdom of Jesus Christ ; and men qualified with knowledge and experience in the things pertaining to souls, and of a Christian and godly carriage, have been passed by because of a mean condition in the world. Better it is that the number be few, before we choose the ignorant and scandalous, and that they be of a low degree if godly, than of a high degree if otherwise. That Elders may the more conveniently discharge their duty,² it is convenient that the congregation be divided into so many parts, and that some competent part be assigned to the more peculiar care and inspection of every Elder, yet so as he neglect not to take heed to all the flock of God, over which the Holy Ghost hath made him an overseer.

¹ First Book of Discipline, chap. vi, sect. 4; 2 Cor. ii, 7, 8.

² Acts of the Assembly 1646.

OF DEACONS.

CHAPTER I.

OF THEIR NAME.

THAT we may also understand what doth belong unto Deacons, we shall speak of them shortly after the same order. 1st, Of their name. 2nd, Of their institution. 3rd, Of their calling. 4th, Of their duty and qualification. The word Deacon, largely taken, signifies any servant or minister.¹ Therefore in the New Testament it doth sometimes comprehend all church officers, even the apostles themselves.² Because every church officer is appointed of God for perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, *εἰς εργα διακονίας*, and edifying the body of Christ.³ When we speak of Deacons in the Kirk, it is not taken in this large sense for any church officer of whatsoever sort, but for a certain kind of church officers,⁴ distinct from pastors, teachers, and elders, to whom the collection and distribution of the goods of the Church doth belong, for the supply of the necessities of the poor.

CHAPTER II.

OF THE INSTITUTION OF DEACONS.

THE institution of the office of Deacon in the church of Christ is divine—it is a special ordinance and appointment of Jesus Christ, that there should be a Deacons in his house.^{5 6} The apostle gives command to the

¹ First Book of Discipline, chap. viii; Matt. xxiii, 11.

² 1 Cor. iii, 5.

³ Eph. iv, 12.

⁴ F' st Book of Discipline, chap. viii.

⁵ Acts, vi, 3.

⁶ The reader may wish to see the remarks of Gillespie in his work already referred to, "Assertion of the Government of the Church of Scotland in the points of Ruling Elder, &c., Edinburgh, 1641,"

disciples to choose out among themselves men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and of wisdom, whom they might appoint over the business of the poor, which was accordingly done, as may be seen in the 5th and 6th verses of that chapter. Neither was this a temporary institution upon this particular occasion for the church of Jerusalem only, but for all the churches of Christ to the end of the world.¹ Therefore the apostle Paul, in several of his epistles to the churches, doth mention them.² He exhorteth him that gives or imparts (i. e. the Deacon, to whom the care of giving and distributing is committed,) to do it with simplicity.³ He reckons helps (i. e. Deacons, who are appointed for helping the poor,) among those officers

or the subject of Deacons, as the office is understood and practised in churches not Presbyterian. He says, page 79, "In the Roman, yea in Prelatical churches, there are scarcely any foot-steps at all of the offices of Preaching Presbyters and Deacons as they were instituted by the apostles. The apostles ordained Presbyters to preach the word, to minister the sacraments, to govern the church, and to make use of the keys. But the Popish and Prelatical Presbyters have not the power of the keys nor the power of Church government, for it is proper to their Prelates (Bishops). As for the other two they are common to their Deacons, for they also do preach and baptize. The office of the Popish priest standeth in two things—to consecrate and offer up the body of Christ, and to absolve the faithful from their sins. (See Conci. Trident. de Sacr. ordin. cap. I. Hier. Savanarola. Triumph cruc. lib. iii, cap. 16.) And the same, too, make up the proper office of the priest by the order of the English Service Book.

"As touching Deacons, they were ordained by the Apostles for collecting, receiving, and distributing of ecclesiastical goods, for maintaining of ministers, schools, churches, the sick, strangers, and poor. The Popish and Prelatical Deacons have no such office, but an office which the apostles never appointed to them, for they had no preaching or baptizing. Philip preached and baptized, not as a Deacon, but as an Evangelist, Acts, xxi, 8. Besides, at the time of his preaching and baptizing, he could not have exercised the office of his deaconship by reason of the persecution which scattered rich and poor and all. Acts, viii, 1. That which Stephen did, Acts, vii, was no more than every believer was bound to do when he is called to give a testimony to the truth, and to give a reason of his faith and practice."

¹ First Book of Discipline, chap. viii.

² Rom. xii, 8.

³ 1 Cor. xii, 28.

whom God hath set in his church ; and writing to the Philippians, he directs his epistle to all the saints in Christ, with the Bishops, (or overseers, under whom he comprehends ministers, teachers, and elders,) and to the Deacons,¹ wherein he gives rules concerning the qualification and carriage of all church officers. He treats of the Deacons at large, ch. iii, 8—13.

From the divine institution of Deacons we gather —1st, That the Deacon is a distinct officer from the elder.² It is a defect and fault in some congregations that they put no difference betwixt these two, but so confound and mingle them together, as if they were both one, either appointing none for the office of Deacon, but leaving that charge also upon the elders, or else giving the Deacons the same power and employment with the elders. It is true whatsoever the Deacon may do by virtue of his office, that same may be done by an elder, as whatsoever is done by an elder may be done by a minister; because the higher and more eminent officers in the church include the powers of the lower. It is also true that the Deacons may assist in judgment with the ministers and elders,³ and be helping to them in those things that concern the oversight of the congregations by information and advice; yet it is necessary that congregations should so far regard the ordinances and reverence the wisdom of God in appointing these officers, as to have both Elders and Deacons, and to preserve them distinct in their actings and operations, not giving to the Deacons or suffering them to assume the Elder's office. 2nd, That Deacons are not to count light of this employment, or any others to esteem lightly of them, because they are called thereunto and do exercise the same; but that they themselves and all others ought to look upon it as one of these holy and honourable employments which the wisdom of God hath thought fit to appoint in his house for supplying the necessities of the saints. The Lord Jesus himself did not disdain to wash his disciples' feet ; angels are all of them ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for their sakes

¹ 1 Timothy. ² First Book of Discipline, chap. ii, p. 74.

³ First Book of Discipline, chap. ii, p. 57.

who are appointed to be heirs of salvation. Why then should any think it below them to serve the church of Christ, and to minister to the saints in this employment?¹

CHAPTER III.

OF THE CALLING OF DEACONS.

NONE is to step into this office but he that is lawfully called thereto.² Unto their calling it is needful—1st, That they have abilities and gifts fit for the charge, together with an honest purpose of heart to serve the Lord faithfully in the discharge of the same, by seeking his honour and the good of the church. 2nd, That they be chosen by the congregation in which they are to serve, which choice is to be made after the same manner as that of a Ruling Elder. 3rd, That trial be taken by the minister and elders concerning their conversation, that it be blameless and holy; and concerning their gifts, that they have that tenderness, discretion, dexterity, and prudence that is fit for that employment, and that they be admitted to their charge with prayer and supplication and opening of the word, concerning their duty, publicly in the congregation, where they are solemnly to engage themselves to be faithful in the trust committed to them of God.³

CHAPTER IV.

OF THEIR DUTY—FIRST, OF THEIR CONVERSATION.

THEIR duty is either that which concerns their conversation or their office and calling. For their conversation the apostle shows what it must be.⁴ 1. They must not be double-tongued nor liars nor disseemblers nor deceivers. 2. They must not be given to much wine, nor tipplers nor drunkards, nor lovers nor followers of strong

¹ 1 Tim. iii, 13.

² Second Book of Discipline, chap. viii.

³ Acts, vi, 3, 5, 6; 1 Tim. iii, 10.

⁴ 1 Tim. iii, 8—12.

drink. 3. They must not be greedy of filthy lucre, nor such as are covetous, and whose hearts run after the things of the world. 4. They must be grave men, of a posed and staid carriage, and not of a light and vain behaviour. 5. They must be such as hold fast the mystery of faith in a pure conscience, that is, who do not only know the doctrine of the Gospel, but do hold fast the faith thereof without wavering, and study to have a good conscience in walking answerably thereto. 6. They must be the husband of one wife, such as abstain from all unlawful lusts, satisfying themselves with the remedy allowed of God. 7. They must be such as rule their own houses and their children well; such as command and instruct their children and household to keep the way of the Lord, going before them in the practice of piety and godliness, and all holy and religious duties.

CHAPTER V.

OF THE DUTIES OF THEIR CALLING.

THE duties that Deacons are bound to perform in their calling may be reduced to these heads:¹ 1st. That they be careful to take exact notice of such as are poor in the congregation, and have not wherewith to maintain themselves. 2nd. That they be careful from time to time to collect and receive from the several members of the congregation and strangers that come among them what the Lord shall incline their hearts to give for a supply of the necessities of the poor; and in a seasonable and Christian way to stir up and exhort to charity and liberality that the more may be given. 3rd. That what is received and collected by them be faithfully delivered that it may be put into the treasury of the congregation. 4th. That they do timeously make known the several conditions and necessities of the several poor within the congregation to the Church Session, that provision may be appointed accordingly for each

¹ Second Book of Discipline, chap. viii.

of them, that so the poor may not be put to begging, to the grief of their spirits and the reproach of the Gospel. 5th. That they be careful, honestly and in simplicity without respect of persons, to distribute and deliver to the poor what is appointed for supply of their necessities; and if they be orphans and young ones, or such who have no knowledge nor understanding, nor ability to dispose and order the things that concern their food and raiment, that the Deacons honestly employ and bestow what is given for their use that they may be supplied in these things. 6th. That they be careful that what belongs to the poor be not dilapidated nor applied to any other use; and if there be any stock in the church treasure it be improved to the best advantage for the benefit and use of the poor. Yet so that the poor be rather always supplied than money treasured up for a vain show. 7th. That they be careful to take notice of those that are sick that they may acquaint the ministers and elders therewith for visiting them, and if they be poor, that their necessities may be supplied.

That Deacons may the more conveniently discharge their duty, it is fit that some part of the congregation be assigned to every one of them for the better inspection of the poor thereof, and that the diets of collecting for the poor be divided amongst them.

The number of Deacons in every congregation is to be according to the proportion of the congregation and of the poor therein; and though there be no necessity of an equal number of Elders and Deacons, yet it is fit that each Elder have some Deacon to be assisting to him in the bounds of which he hath more peculiar inspection, that so both the one and the other may discharge their duty with the greater facility to themselves, and with the greater benefit and advantage to the congregation.

SCRIPTURAL AUTHORITY
FOR THE
OFFICE OF RULING ELDER.

CHAPTER I.

THOUGH the foregoing admirable Tract summarily embraces most of the leading points connected with the eldership in the Presbyterian church, and is composed in a style far ahead of the age in which it was written—a plain proof that it is the production of a superior mind; and though the views of the office which it unfolds be most exact and enlightened, still there is room for additional observations. The Scripture argument, as well as that which is drawn from church history, admits of a much more ample illustration, and such statements are peculiarly called for in the present day. I have only to regret the necessary repetition of sentiments which may already have been expressed in the Tract of Guthrie. But this the intelligent reader will readily bear with. There is not a little in what follows which, it is believed, will be new and interesting to many readers.

In treating of the office of Elder, it is impossible to avoid alluding to the question of the Scriptural form of Church government—a question as to which Presbyterians seriously differ from many with whom they are happily at one in the higher question of doctrine; but I shall not enter more into these points than is absolutely

necessary to vindicate the procedure of the Presbyterian church. I shall not unnecessarily assail the principles and practice of other Protestant and evangelical churches. In treating of Church Government at all, or of a leading part of it, of course it is impossible to avoid altogether referring to opposite and rival systems of rule. I trust, however, that where this is done, it will be done without bitterness or prejudice, in a firm and decided, but withal gentle and Christian spirit.

I am not called upon to enter on the general question of Church government—to advocate Presbytery as opposed to Episcopacy and Independency or Congregationalism—to maintain the equality of ministers against the one, or a gradation of Courts, embracing Kirk Sessions, Presbyteries, Synods, and General Assemblies, against the exclusive rule of each individual congregation in the other. It is one part, and only one, but now a distinctive part of Presbyterian church government which I am called on to consider, and that is the office of the Ruling Elder. The time was when this office was substantially recognised by Episcopalians. Eminent Episcopal writers could be referred to for this point. And the time was when the most distinguished Independent writers, and even official documents of Independent churches could be appealed to, vindicating its scriptural authority :¹ but in more modern times these views have disappeared, and now the Ruling Elder is one of the distinguishing characteristics of Presbyterian church government. It is essential to its existence : and to few parts of the Presbyterian system are Episcopalians and Independents more keenly

¹ One of the most masterly vindications of the office of the Ruling Elder on Scriptural grounds is to be found in Dr. Owen's 'True Nature of a Gospel Church and its Government,' pp. 224—302, written at a time when he was an Independent. Indeed all the distinguished British Independents of the seventeenth century held the same views. And from Mather's 'Magnalia,' (Platform of Church Discipline, 1649,) it is manifest that the Congregational Churches of New England, which were generally looked up to by religious parties in this country as the very representatives of pure Congregational principle, recognised the same office as of divine authority, and embodied it in their standards.

opposed. Indeed they have made it a matter of no small reproach. The term "*lay* elder" is itself a term of scorn; but the reproach is unfounded. There is no such office. The office of Elder is an ecclesiastical one. He who holds it ceases to be a layman. The proper term is Ruling Elder, to distinguish it from the Minister, who is a Teaching Elder, or Bishop.¹

All agree that there must be government of some kind in the Christian church. Without this it is not an organised body. It is a miscellaneous mob—open to universal anarchy and confusion. All, too, agree in holding that Christ has appointed a particular government in his church. Men have differed as to the place where, or persons in whom the right of government is placed by Scripture. Some have placed it in one or a few individuals, overseeing the whole flock—this is Prelacy or Episcopacy, which corresponds to what in civil government would be called an absolute monarchy. Others have vested it in the whole body of Christian members male and female, in a particular congregation, and without any appeal to others—this is Congregationalism or Independency, and corresponds in civil government to democracy. And others again have placed it in Church courts composed of ministers and elders elected by the church members, with the liberty of appeal from one court of review to another, in order to secure the highest wisdom and judgments un-

¹ Perhaps it would tend to correct false impressions as to officers in the Presbyterian church, were the Presbyterians of this country to adopt the practice, which is followed by their brethren in the United States of America, of using only Scriptural names when speaking of their ecclesiastical officers. Thus, in reporting members to the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of America, ministers are styled bishops, and elders are denominated ruling elders. This restores the word *bishop* to its primitive Scripture meaning, and deprives our Episcopalian friends of an undue advantage which they possess, from the popular impression that there can be no bishops but diocesan bishops, such as govern the Church of England, owing to the word in common speech being appropriated to them. In the same way, the term *elder* would be speedily freed from absurd and unmerited reproach. More error is conveyed and perpetuated by incorrect names than many imagine. They exert an injurious influence even over minds which know better.

biassed by local prejudice—this last is Presbytery, the form of government under which the members of the Church of Scotland have the happiness to live. It is essentially representative, and corresponds to the popular branch of a limited monarchy or republic.

These three forms of government exhaust the great leading divisions of ecclesiastical rule. Power must be placed somewhere, either in the hands of a few, or in the hands of a multitude, or in representatives elected from the many. Now, as I have said, all Christian churches are agreed that Christ has appointed a particular government in his house. The question is, which is the government; and though far inferior in importance to the question of what is saving truth, still it is not to be despised. It is of high importance, and is daily rising in magnitude. Not long ago good men were disposed to give up all points of mere government, form, discipline, and worship, as matters of no moment. But this latitudinarianism is not countenanced by Scripture, and the course of events is rapidly bringing Christians round to sounder views.

The question which I am called upon to establish is that the office of the Ruling Elder, as distinct from the Minister on the one hand and the Deacon on the other, is an ecclesiastical office, founded on express scriptural authority, and that no Christian church is entitled to dispense with it. However important may be the considerations of expediency in behalf of this office—if we could only plead expediency—if we could not point to the authority of the word of God, our ground, comparatively speaking, would be weak and insecure. The great thing, in whatever is connected with the Christian church, is to be able to point to the mind and will of God. This solves all difficulties—settles all disputes. Men may devise what is mischievous, thinking it a good; but God is infallible, and all His arrangements, whether we comprehend them or not, must tend to the well being of his people.

Looking at the matter abstractly and without reference to Scripture, one would naturally expect that there should be some such office as that of the Ruling Elder in the Christian church,—that some men should be

associated with the minister to aid him in taking charge of and governing the church. The duties of superintending even a moderately-sized congregation in the most favourable circumstances, of attending to the young and the sick, candidates for admission, and subjects of discipline, are evidently far too numerous and weighty to be adequately discharged by a single individual, however active and able, amid all the distraction and anxiety connected with other and strictly professional duties. Besides, ministers from their studies and habits and unacquaintance with the world, are often imperfectly fitted for the business and management of a congregation, in which much knowledge of character and prudence and tact are necessary. These things render the aid of Ruling Elders peculiarly requisite. Even those who are on scripture principle opposed to the office, confess the propriety and importance of such aid as it supplies; and not a few ministers who are not Presbyterian are glad to ask and receive the aid of laymen in carrying forward the great religious objects which the charge of a congregation involves. Knowing, as we do, the condescension and considerate kindness of the Great Head of the church to his ministering servants when engaged in his work, we would naturally expect Him to make some provision for their assistance and encouragement, and that in a direct, regular, and authorised form. We can scarcely imagine that he would leave them to bear the burden undivided and alone.

These expectations are supported by scripture fact. It is well known that the New Testament church rose out of the Old, and that in all which is not ceremonial but moral, the Jewish is, in point of great principles and institutions, a guide and example to the Christian church. We can see a reason for this. Such were the strong prejudices of the Jews that the Saviour and his Apostles were most averse to innovate, unless the innovation were expressly required. They were anxious to win to the faith of the Gospel, and this could only be done by coming as near to the Jews as possible. We know that in the matter of circumcision and other practices the primitive teachers conformed to the views and

wishes of the Jews—a pretty plain indication that they would yield to them in church government, and in what was less important. The want, too, of very full and exact descriptions of church government and order for the Christian church confirms the same idea. It intimates that in those points the early believers were left to follow the practice of the Jewish church with which they were intimately acquainted. This, of course, would render specific directions less necessary.

And what, then, was the order of the Jewish church? It embraced, we may safely say, through the whole period of its history, *elders of the people* as distinct ecclesiastical officers. We have the testimony of Scripture to this effect, and also of the most learned enquirers into Jewish antiquities. We read¹ of the elders of the priests and the elders of the people, and the elders of the people forming constituent members of the great Sanhedrim—of the chief of the fathers being joined with the priests and judging in the matters of the Lord. We read² of the same parties in the days of Christ and his Apostles holding meetings as a court and judging in ecclesiastical causes, as in the alleged blasphemy of our blessed Saviour,³ and in that of Stephen

¹ Jer. xix, 1.

² 2 Chron. xix, 8.

³ As George Gillespie was one of the most eminent ministers of the Church of Scotland, a commissioner from Scotland, and leading member of the Westminster Assembly of Divines, and as his work on the ‘Government of the Church of Scotland with the points of Ruling Elders,’ &c. is comparatively rare and little known, I shall subjoin a few sentences upon the matter in hand. Alluding to the time of Christ he says, pp. 85, 86—“ Notwithstanding that in these later times all good order had much degenerated and grown to confusion, yet it seems to me, that even in the days of our Saviour Christ, the civil and ecclesiastical courts remained distinct. Let me say my opinion, with all men’s leave, and under correction of the more learned. That night that our Lord was betrayed, he was led to the hall of Caiaphas, where an ecclesiastical sanhedrim was held, who asked Jesus of his disciples and his doctrine, received witness against him, and pronounced him guilty of blasphemy.—Matt. xxvii, 57; Mark, xiv, 53—55; John, xviii, 19. I find nothing in this council why we should think it civil; for as touching the smiting and buffeting of Christ, some think it was by the servants of the high priests and elders, after they themselves had gone and left the council. However, it was done tumultuously, not judicially; and tumults

the first martyr. We read, too, of the rulers of the Synagogue, who were obviously neither priests nor Levites, and much less civil magistrates. Indeed the distinction between the elders of the people and the civil magistrate is apparent from many passages of Scripture, and has been demonstrated by Samuel Rutherford of the Church of Scotland, and by bishop Stillingfleet of the Church of England,¹ beyond the possibility of cavil. The most learned writers on Jewish antiquities, following Jewish authorities, too, however much they may differ on other points, whether Episcopalian or Presbyterians, have established that under the Jewish church there was a court of three elders in every synagogue, which took charge of the whole of its ecclesiastical inspection, government, and discipline, receiving and rejecting members, &c. &c. No fact is more certain or universally acknowledged in Jewish history. It is of no consequence to the argument whether *all* these elders did, or did not teach—they *all* ruled. They formed a court for this purpose; and hence it is evident that the government of the Jewish church was neither in the hands of one individual, as it is among the Episcopalian, nor in the hands of the whole members of the Synagogue, as it is among the Independents of the present day; but that so far as the office of the Ruling Elder is concerned it was strictly Presbyterian.

Spencer, a learned Episcopalian divine of the 17th century, in perfect harmony with the views which have been stated, says, “The Apostles, that this reformation of the change from the Old to the New Testament dispensation might proceed gently and without noise,

may fall forth in any judicatory, whether civil or ecclesiastical. As for the sentence which they gave, (he is guilty of death,) it proves not that this was a civil court; for just so, if an incestuous person should be convicted before an assembly of our church, the moderator might ask the assembly—“What think ye?” and they might well answer he is guilty of death—away with him to the magistrate. Shortly then, the matter debated in this nocturnal council was merely ecclesiastical, and the accusation of sedition and making himself a king were not spoken of till he was brought before Pilate.

¹ Miller, p. 20.

ceived into the Christian church many of those institutions which had long been in use among the Jews. Among the number of these may be reckoned the imposition of hands, bishops, elders, and deacons, excommunication and ordination, and other things familiar to learned men."¹ The celebrated Neander of Berlin, himself a converted Jew, and perhaps the most profoundly learned church historian in Europe at the present day, bears a similar testimony, particularly as to the Jewish Ecclesiastical Courts of Elders—the point more immediately in hand.

We now pass from the Old to the New Testament, and in doing so, what do we find? Do we meet with any repeal of the synagogue form of government? Of course the temple passed away as a typical institution, when Christ the substitute had come; but the divine worship of the synagogue being moral, is permanent in its nature. Are there, then, any cautions addressed to the primitive Christians, who were Jews, against adopting the synagogue form of government, in which there were ministers and Ruling Elders? There was no small danger of men modelling the Christian church after the synagogue; but there is not one word of repeal or caution. Nothing is said of a new form of government, the Episcopal, or Prelatical, or Independent, being introduced with the new dispensation. The primitive Christians unchallenged are allowed to act upon the forms of government to which they had been accustomed. There is force in such considerations. Christian churches, both established and non-established, are in the habit of reasoning upon them as valid. We argue for the civil establishment of true religion—for the observance of infant baptism, and the moral obligation of the Sabbath, from the fact, that in the New Testament there is not only no repeal but no caution against principles involving these—recognised and acted upon in the Old; and why should church government be an exception to the rule? If we count it a good argument for infant baptism and sabbath observance and church establishments that they are found in the Old Testament, and that they are not repealed in

¹ Miller, p. 31.

the New, is it not equally a good argument for the office of Ruling Elder that we find it in the Jewish church, and that we meet with no abrogation of, or even caution against it in the New Testament? In such circumstances the burden of proof lies with opponents. So far from meeting with anything which savours of a different system, when we begin to read the New Testament we immediately meet with language which reminds us of the church government of the Old.

The first thing which strikes one in the pages of the New Testament, as affording a strong presumption of the identity of the church governments of the Old and New is the *number* of the Elders who are spoken of as attached to each church. So far as I remember, we never read of *one* Elder being ordained to a church. It might have been so, and still the government have been Presbyterian—(there might have been only one to be had)—but we always read of more than one—we read of Elders. And when they had ordained them *Elders* in every church, they commended them to the Lord.¹ Paul called for the *Elders* of the church of Ephesus.² Is any sick among you, let him send for the *Elders* of the church.³ Titus was left in Crete that he might ordain *Elders* in every city.⁴ Obey *them* that have the rule over you—not *him*.⁵ Let the *Elders* who rule well be counted worthy of double honour. It is plain that the elders spoken of were not all teaching Elders or ministers. It would be absurd to imagine that, in primitive times, when many churches were very small, and when all were most anxious to propagate the Gospel, there was a plurality of three or four ministers in every church. The Elders then must have been persons who did not teach—except occasionally upon an emergency—persons whose office it was to rule. It is worthy of notice, that the apostles are not said to ordain Elders—only in large congregations, but in every church, however small. Being ruling Elders, they were essential to its complete organisation. As teaching Elders or ministers they would have been needed only in the large

¹ Acts, xiv, 23. ² Acts, xx, 20. ³ James, v, 14.

⁴ Titus, i, 5. ⁵ Heb. xiii, 17.

towns; and not always in them; for in not a few, such as Antioch and Carthage, we know that there was but a single place of worship centuries after the death of our blessed Lord. From the very number of Elders then spoken of in the New Testament, and which forcibly reminds us of the Elders so often spoken of in the Old Testament, we draw not a proof, but a strong presumption, that the great body of them were Ruling Elders. At least the fact seems inexplicable on the supposition of the opposite systems of church government.

But, turning from presumptions to proofs, we find three passages of Scripture which distinctly recognise the office of the Ruling Elder, and which no efforts of ingenuity, (and these have not been small,) can force to bear a different interpretation. The apostle Paul, after expounding the great leading doctrines of the Gospel, in his Epistle to the Romans, concludes with practical counsels; among the parties whom he addresses are the office-bearers and members of the church at Rome. Comparing the church and its office-bearers, ordinary and extraordinary, to the human body and its different members, he says, in the 12th chapter, at the 4th verse:—"For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office; so we being many are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. Having then gifts, (or offices,) differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy, according to the proportion of faith; or ministry, let us wait on our ministering; or he that teacheth, on teaching; or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; *he that ruleth*, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness." Here distinct offices and office-bearers are pointed out. Some extraordinary, such as prophesying; others ordinary, such as teaching, and among the latter are numbered the ruling Elder and the Deacon. "He that ruleth" is to do so with diligence—marking the Elder: "he that giveth," with simplicity—marking the Deacon. The office of ruling is distinct from that of teaching—as distinct as the different parts of the human body, the hands and the feet, are from each other. The ruler is as distinct

from the teacher as he is distinct from the deacon. It is expressly said that "all members have not the same office." It is vain, then, to say that the apostle speaks not of different persons; but different gifts belonging to one and the same person. The language and imagery distinctly exclude such an idea, and prove, whatever may be the nature of the duties, that there is in the Christian church an office of ruler distinct from that of teacher or pastor. For this office and office-bearer, however, we look in vain in Episcopal or Congregational churches, and thus far they depart from Scripture rule and authority. Some old Presbyterian ministers of the city of London, after remarking, in an able work on Church Government, that he that ruleth is distinguished from all the other ordinary officers in the church of Christ by a distinct name—a distinct work—and a distinct direction as to the right discharge of his duties, pertinently add—"Now, what other solid reason can be imagined why he that ruleth should here have a distinct name—a distinct employment—and distinct direction how to manage his work, save this, that the Holy Ghost might set him out to us as an ordinary officer in the church, distinct from all the other standing officers here enumerated?"¹

Supposing that there were such an officer as the Ruling Elder in the early church, how could he, according to the general counsels in which the apostle was dealing, have been more appropriately referred to? Supposing there were no such officer, what could be more fitted to mislead than the allusion made? Let none object to the interpretation which has been given from the impression that it makes the Ruling Elder the only Elder. No. To adopt the language of the same old writers—"Though the Ruling Elder be here called 'he that ruleth;' yet this doth not exclude the pastor from ruling no more than, when the ordinary ministers are called pastors and teachers, the apostles and evangelists are excluded from feeding and teaching the flock. The Elder is called 'he that ruleth'—not because there is no other ruler than he, but because he only rules—he does not teach."²

¹ "Divine Right of Church Government," &c. London, 1646. p. 121.

² Ibid., p. 124.

Calvin in his ‘Institutions,’ book iv, chap. 3, referring to the passage which has been quoted, makes these among other remarks:—“There are two offices that are permanent, *government* and the *care of the poor*. Those who governed were, in my opinion, Elders chosen out of the laymen of each congregation, who, together with the bishops (or ministers), bore rule in the correction of morals and in the exercise of discipline. For no one can otherwise expound that which the apostle saith, Rom. xii, 8, ‘*He that ruleth let him do it with diligence.*’ Every church, therefore, from the beginning had its own *senate*, collected from among the godly, grave, and holy, who had jurisdiction over the correction of vices. Moreover, that this was the order of more than one age, experience itself teaches. This office of government, therefore, is necessary for all ages.”

A passage, similar to that we have been considering, and warranting the same conclusion, is to be found in 1st Cor. xii, 28. It proceeds upon the same comparison of the church of Christ to the human body, and runs in these terms:—“And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it. Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular. And God hath set some in the church, first, apostles; secondarily, prophets; thirdly, teachers; after that miracles; then gifts of healings, helps, *governments*, diversities of tongues. Are all apostles? are all prophets?” &c. &c.

All admit, even the warmest opponents, that by “governments” here are meant governors or rulers, and that these governors are not in the State, but in the Church. It is expressly said, “God hath set some in the church;” and what sort of governors then are they? They are expressly distinguished from the pastors or teachers, and also from the helps or deacons. And what then can they describe but officers substantially the same in character with the Ruling Elder in Presbyterian churches? They are rulers, not teachers. Extraordinary officers are referred to, as well as ordinary ones, such as “miracles” and “diversities of tongues;” but

that does not affect the argument. Ordinary officers are also obviously described. The apostle was writing for the guidance of the church in all ages. His argument is general. It is plain, too, that he speaks—not of different offices inhering in one person—but of different offices belonging to different persons. He expressly says—“Are all prophets? are all apostles?” The obvious answer to which is—“No. All are not prophets or apostles. The offices are diverse, held by different individuals; but as they conduce to a common good, the parties should be united in sentiment and heart.” If all the offices which are spoken of by the apostle were held by one individual—say the pastor alone, and only then, contrary to Paul’s argument, the pastor might truly say to the ruler and the deacon, “I have no need of thee.” But now Christ hath so set the members in his body, the church, that every member stands in need of the sympathy and support of the other. It may be also added, that the interpretation which has been given of Paul’s words is not a party interpretation, got up to serve a purpose; but is the interpretation assigned to the passage by eminent Reformed divines—Lutherans and Calvinists—by divines of the Episcopal Church of England—by ancient fathers of the church, and even by writers of the Church of Rome.¹

The last scriptural authority on behalf of the office of Ruling Elder to which I shall refer is that contained in 1 Tim. vii, 17—“Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine.” Nothing can be plainer, than that this verse speaks of two classes of Elders—those who rule, and those who labour in the word and doctrine—the one corresponding to the Ruling Elder, the other to the Teacher or Pastor. As it is fatal to the claims of the opposite forms of church government, (neither Episcopacy nor modern Congregationalism recognising the Ruling Elder,) so, as might have been expected, there has been a vast expenditure of ingenuity to make the verse harmonise with their theories; but the labour is vain; there is no doubt

¹ Vindication of the Presbyterial Government and Ministry, 1650. London, 37. Miller, 40. 1.

about the translation ; the passage is too clear to admit of perversion. We may safely say, with the great Dr. Owen, himself an Independent at the time he wrote, though there is good reason to believe he died a Presbyterian¹—that had men not had a particular scheme to support, they never would have doubted that the verse speaks of different classes of elders—ruling and teaching. The word *especially* almost invariably, in the New Testament, distinguishes different objects or persons ; and in the present case that signification cannot be departed from. “Let us do good unto all men,” says the apostle Paul, “but *especially* unto them who are of the household of faith.” These two different classes are plainly distinguished—“all men,” and “the household of faith.” So “all the saints salute you,” says the same apostle, “chiefly, or *especially* they of Cæsar’s household.” Here Cæsar’s household are distinguished from other Christians. “Christ is the Saviour or Preserver of all men, *especially* of those who believe.” Two different classes are spoken of—“all men,” and “believers.” A multitude of similar passages could be quoted, all showing that two classes of persons or things are to be distinguished. So it is of the words—“Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honour, *especially* they who labour in the word and doctrine.” It is obvious that there are two classes of elders—ruling Elders, and teaching Elders or Ministers. The great effort of writers on the other side, of course, is to show that there is but one class of persons spoken of, and that they are ministers ; but, apart from the interpretation which the words demand, the scope and meaning of the apostle disprove the idea. If by “those who rule well,” we are to understand ministers who do not labour in the word and doctrine, we are reduced to the absurdity of supposing that the apostle commends such idle, non-preaching ministers as worthy of double honour! The notion cannot be entertained for a moment. Nor will it mend the matter much to suppose, with some, that by the good rulers here spoken of we are to understand, not ecclesiastical officers, but civil magistrates ; for to this there is the conclusive

¹ Vide Appendix.

reply, that there was no Christian magistrate for centuries after the counsel was given to Timothy, and no one can suppose that the apostle recommended an appeal to Heathen magistrates to settle Christian differences.

It has been alleged that the apostle did not mean to mark a diversity among the Elders—some teaching, others ruling—but a diversity in the diligent discharge of duty by persons holding the same office. This makes the force of the sentence turn on the word “labour.” According to this interpretation, the apostle exhorts Christians to hold those Elders in double honour who *labour* in the word and doctrine, who are more eminently laborious than their brethren. But this proceeds upon the idea that the original word *πονητας* describes only such labour as few can attain to; whereas both in the Old and New Testament, it is the general word which is used to denote any labour in the service of God. It is applied to the services of the faithful women spoken of in the 16th of Romans—Mary, Tryphena and Tryphosa. It is every minister’s duty to labour with all diligence, and even to fatigue, in the service of his Master. Without this, so far from deserving double honour, he is negligent, and exposes himself to just censure. Gillespie’s remark¹ on the interpretation suggested is—“This is manifestly against the text, which speaketh of officers, not of offices—of persons, not of duties; for it is not said especially for labouring, but ‘especially *they* that labour.’”

To give the greater weight to the interpretation which has been assigned, (though it be so strong in itself as not to need any,) it may be mentioned that distinguished writers of different nations, ages, and churches, many of them opposed to Presbyterian Church Government, have felt themselves constrained to adopt the same view. Dr. Owen has been already referred to; and to his name may be added those of Dr. Whittaker, Lightfoot, Whitby, Bishops Fell and Burnet—all eminent Episcopilians; and, among Independents may be mentioned Doddridge and Dwight. Were it necessary to appeal to the divines of Foreign churches, we might quote

¹ P. 48.

the names of such eminent Presbyterians as Calvin, Beza, Bullenger, Peter Martyr, Turretine, Piscator, Pareus, &c., the Divines of the Dutch Synod of Dort, and many others, also in support of the interpretation which has been given.

Owen, in his able critical discussion on this passage, makes the following remarks:—"The most learned of our Protestant adversaries in this case are Erastus, Bilson, Saravia, Downham, Scultetus, Mead, Grotius, Hammond, who agree not at all among themselves about the sense of the words; for their whole design and endeavour is, to put in exceptions against the obvious sense and interpretation of the words, not fixing on any determinate exposition of it themselves—such as they will abide by in opposition to any other sense of the place. Now this is a most sophistical way of arguing upon testimonies, and suited only to make controversies endless; whose art is so barren as not to be able to raise one exception or other against the plainest and most evident testimony. So the Socinians deal with us in all the testimonies we produce to prove the Deity or Satisfaction of Christ. They suppose it enough to evade their force, if they can but pretend that the words are *capable* of another sense, although they will not abide by it that this or that is their real sense." Again—"They do not in the least agree among themselves, scarce any two of them, on what is the most probable sense of the word; nor are any of them singly well-resolved what application to make of them, nor unto what persons, but only propose things as their conjecture. But of very many opinions or conjectures that are advanced in this case, all of them but of one are accompanied with the modesty of granting that *divers sorts of Elders* are here intended, which without more than ordinary confidence cannot be denied."¹

Additional Scripture passages, too, might be quoted, such as Heb. xiii, 17, and Mat. xviii, 15, &c., which cannot be consistently or satisfactorily explained without recognising the Ruling Elder of Presbyterian church government. But we pass from these to the testimony of the early church, as it appears in the writings of the Fathers.

¹ *Gospel Church, &c.*, pp. 248, 249.

CHAPTER II.

ARGUMENT IN BEHALF OF THE RULING ELDER DRAWN
FROM THE HISTORY OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH.

HERE it is necessary to mark an important distinction between the ground on which we have been standing—the *word of God*—and the ground on which we are about to stand—the *word of fallible men*; still, the testimony is worthy of no small consideration. We are in the habit of appealing to it on other matters—in behalf of the observance of infant baptism, and the rest of the first day of the week—not that it could establish these, or any thing else, if *opposed* to the Scriptures; but the authority of the Fathers is important, where it harmonises with the Word of God and bears upon facts; and it may even throw light upon what is doubtful in Scripture, by showing how it was understood by the primitive church. At the same time we must never forget that the word of God is the only infallible standard, and that corruption in doctrine and practice was so very early introduced into the Christian church that her testimony either for or against any form of church government is to be received with extreme caution. We must ever draw a broad and clear line between the Word of God and the writings of man, especially writings so old, and in many cases so loose, general, and contradictory as those of the Fathers.

After making all these abatements, however, we have no hesitation in saying, that in all ages of the Christian church we can mark distinct traces of the Ruling Elder; and that the purer the times, these traces are always the more clear and better defined. In the Epistles of *Clemens Romanus*, who lived at the end of the 1st century, and so contemporaneously with the latter years of John, we meet with language which plainly indicates that there was a plurality of elders in every

church, and that these elders were rulers, which is at war with the claims of Episcopacy and Congregationalism. Of *Ignatius*, who lived a little later, at the beginning of the 2nd century, an able writer¹ says, "The whole language of Ignatius, in reference to the officers of whom he speaks, is strictly Presbyterian, and cannot be considered as affording countenance to any other system without doing violence to its natural import." The writings of *Polycarp* the martyr could be appealed to to the same purpose. *Cyprian*, in the 3rd century, by the acknowledgment of distinguished Episcopal writers themselves, distinctly intimates that there were elders in the Christian church who did not preach—a class of men who have no place under Episcopal or Congregational rule. From the writings of *Hippolytus*, who lived at the same period, it appears that there were elders, whose office it was to examine—try—and excommunicate unworthy members from the Christian church. *Origen*, a celebrated father, who lived 200 years after Christ, in the 3rd century, expressly says, "there are some rulers appointed, whose duty it is to enquire concerning the manners and conversation of those who are admitted, that they may debar from the congregation such as commit filthiness." From this it is obvious, that in the days of *Origen* the government of the church was administered not by the individual minister alone, nor by all communicants indiscriminately, but by a class of Ruling Elders. In the beginning of the 4th century we have the following enumeration of the office-bearers in the church, in the writings of *Optatus*:—"The Presbyters, the Deacons, and the Elders." Letters, too, are addressed "to the clergy and the elders"—elders being carefully distinguished from clergy. In short, the divisions are distinctly Presbyterian. *Ambrose*, in the 4th century, expressly says, "that the synagogue, and afterwards the church, had elders, without whose counsel nothing was done in the church;" and he explains how it was that their office fell into disuse. Almost all commentators, however divided in sentiment on other matters, allow that the elders of whom this father writes had inspection and rule over the flock of Christ.

¹ Miller, p. 61.

Augustine, in the end of the 4th century, distinctly recognises a class of men bearing office in the church who were not public preachers, and points to their administration of discipline. Though, with the progress of superstition and corruption, the traces of the Ruling Elder become more rare, as we descend the stream of church history; and this is no more than might have been expected—yet even in the 6th century, in an epistle of Gregory the Great, we meet with this sentence—“If any thing should come to your ears concerning any *clergyman*, which may be justly considered matter of offence, do not easily believe it, but let truth be diligently investigated by the *elders* of the church who may be at hand; and then, if the character of the act demand it, let the proper punishment fall on the offender.” Here, the clergyman or minister and the elders are distinguished, and the peculiarity of the elder’s office is marked as a ruler or administrator of discipline.¹

Various other testimonies from early times all pointing in the same direction, might be quoted, but let these suffice. It is possible that a question may be rising in some minds, if the office of the Ruling Elder be so decidedly scriptural as is represented, and evidently held a place in the primitive Christian church—how came it to drop out from the church generally for so protracted a period, and not to exist at all in some churches? In answer to this I shall presently show that it is not correct, in point of fact, to say that the office ever perished from the true church of Christ. I believe it can be proved, that however it may have disappeared from the Church of Rome, it has existed all along in the purest churches of the East, the Syrian, and the purest church of the West, the Waldensian. It certainly became extinct in the Romish church, but, is this any dishonour or ground of suspicion? The Church of Rome has corrupted the doctrine, the duties, the ordinances of Christianity; it would be strange if she had not corrupted the government and discipline of the church

¹ For these and many other quotations in full, see Miller on the Ruling Elder, pp. 52—72; and Vindication of Presbyterial Government, by Ministers of London, 1650.

also; but the truth is, that from the very nature of the office of the Ruling Elder—it was the office which, above all others, in a declining and corrupt period of the church was sure to be extinguished. It is an office which regards discipline—which is intended to repress and punish corruption. Hence, faithfully administered, it is not an office which is pleasant or popular in a degenerating church.

I need not say how wide-spread was the corruption of the Christian church, even from the days of the Apostles. It has always been known that that corruption was serious; but the investigations of modern times in regard to it are bringing out such views of degeneracy as scarcely any were prepared for.¹ It is plain that from the days of the death of the Apostles, though Christianity was wide-spread, it grievously declined in character—that the clergy became most ambitious, and gladly embraced every opportunity of raising themselves at the expence of other office-bearers in the church. A faithful eldership is a serious check upon a proud and indolent ministry. Hence the clergy were happy to get rid of the control of Elders, while a people daily growing in corruption were eager to escape from the same restraint. It is easy then to see how the Eldership disappeared amid the clerical ambition, superstition, worldliness, and idolatry of the Church of Rome. This was just what was to have been anticipated. But the existence of such an office in early times, and the traces of it which we have seen to remain for 600 years, are inexplicable on any other supposition than that of a divine origin. Even in the history of the Church of Scotland and other Presbyterian churches, we see the tendency of a general degeneracy of Christianity to destroy the Eldership: how much stronger would the tendency be in early times to the same destruction, when the declination was so much more serious and appalling? Ambrose, a father of the 4th century, to whom I have already referred, has the remarkable words explanatory of the disappearance of the Eldership from a great part

¹ Vide the admirable but appalling writings of Mr. Taylor, entitled, 'Ancient Christianity,' at present in course of publication.

of Christendom in the dark or middle ages. "By what negligence," says he, "it (i.e. the Eldership) grew into disuse I know not, unless perhaps by the sloth, or rather by the pride of the teachers, while they alone wished to appear something."¹

Leaving the early church, let us now briefly pursue the history downwards. Our Lord promised to his people that there should be a true church in every age—a church, against which the gates of hell should not prevail. Whether, besides true believers, this promise was meant to include a church correct in all its external forms of government, we know not. Probably a company of faithful followers, scattered in different outward communions, was all that was promised. But it would not be difficult to trace a Presbyterian church from primitive down to the present times. We have seen the signs and proofs of the Ruling Elder, in other words, of Presbyterianism, in the 4th and even the 6th centuries. Now, upon the authority of Roman Catholic historians, we can trace the Waldensian church, which was Presbyterian, up to the 312th year of the Christian era. There can be no doubt, too, that the early Scottish church, prior to the reign of Popery, was a Presbyterian church. And we have not only these Presbyterian lines in the Western parts of the world, we can trace the same in the East. The Syrian churches in India, which were visited by Dr. Claudius Buchanan in 1807, can trace their history up to between the 3rd and 4th centuries. They lived in such seclusion as not to be aware of the pretensions of the Pope of Rome—and what was their form of church government? It was, and is essentially Presbyterian. In the church which Dr. Buchanan visited, he did not find Episcopacy or Independency. There may have been admixture; but, to use his own language, he "found three principal Christians or lay Elders belonging to the church, whose names were Abraham, Thomas, and Alexandros."²

With regard again to the Waldenses, those faithful witnesses in the darkest days, of whom it is estimated that, from first to last, not less than one mil-

¹ Miller, p. 71.

² Vide Christian Researches, p. 75.

lion have fallen a sacrifice to Rome, for their attachment to Protestant and evangelical religion—I say that with regard to them their Presbyterianism is well known. In their Confession of faith, which comprehends the ancient as well as the modern church, they say, “it is necessary for the church to have pastors to preach God’s word, to administer the sacraments, and to watch over the sheep of Christ, and also *Elders* and *Deacons*, according to the rules of good and holy church discipline, and the practice of the primitive church.” Here the three orders of the Presbyterian church are distinctly recognised, the Pastor, the Elder, the Deacon. Their Confession of Faith was drawn up hundreds of years before the birth either of Luther or of Calvin. It cannot then be said with truth, that Presbyterianism originated with the Reformation from Popery.

A similar statement might be made with regard to the Bohemian church. It was a branch of the Waldensian, and was planted two hundred years before the days of Jerome and of Huss. They, again, it will be remembered, were harbingers of the Reformation, and lived a century earlier than Luther or Calvin; and yet, from their Confession of Faith, it is plain that they held by the essential principles of Presbyterianism. Luther, after mature information, had the highest opinion of them, eulogised their Confession of Faith, and declared, to use his own words, “there hath not arisen any people, from the times of the Apostles, whose church hath come nearer to the apostolic doctrine and order than the brethren of Bohemia.” What their *order* was, besides the testimony of their Confession of Faith, may be gathered from the testimony of Martin Bucer, a celebrated Lutheran reformed. “The rule which they observe,” says he, was this—“besides ministers of the word and sacraments, they had in each church a bench or college of men excelling in gravity and prudence, who performed the duties of admonishing and correcting offenders, composing differences, and judicially deciding in cases of dispute.” Whatever other offices the Bohemian church may have recognised, it is plain that she held by the Ruling Elder, and that is

a leading and essential feature in Presbyterianism. So far from this office having been first invented, as has been ignorantly alleged, by Calvin the great reformer of Geneva, it was in full operation in the Christian church ages before he was born; and there is reason to think that, in addition to the light of the word of God, one of the considerations which strongly weighed with Calvin to advocate the office so ably was the felt necessity of maintaining the discipline of the church—a discipline which cannot well be upheld without an eldership. Some may remember that Calvin, and other faithful ministers were, by popular tumult, expelled for a season from Geneva, because they would not administer the Lord's Supper to unworthy applicants. This seems to have impressed his mind more strongly than before with the importance of being surrounded with such guardians of discipline as adorned the ancient Bohemian church.¹

I am afraid that the line of observation whieh I am pursuing may seem to some as if I were resting an important church office upon *human authority*, the testimony of great names; but it is not so. I have already and fully appealed to the word of God as the only standard, and believe its authority to be conclusive on the matter. But the case is one where it is of consequence to be able to refer to the constitution and practice of the Christian church, and to the sentiments of illustrious men, the more especially, as it has been so often and so industriously, but, withal, so ignorantly asserted, that the Presbyterian Ruling Elder has no footing in Ecclesiastical history. The very reverse is the truth.

Pursuing the history, then, from the Waldensian and Bohemian churches, we pass on to the Church of Switzerland. The great reformers, Zwingli and Ecolampadius, speak clearly and decidedly on the office of the Ruling Elder as a scriptural office, and as holding a place in the early Christian church. Peter Martyr, a native of Italy, who settled in England, and greatly aided the Reformation there, and John Alasco, a Pole, who settled in London as superintendant of the many foreigners who resided there in the reign of Edward VI, amount-

¹ Vide Appendix for a notice of Calvin in this connection.

ing, it is said, to 3000 persons, both express themselves strongly in behalf of the Ruling Elder. From the statement of the latter it appears that it was upon Presbyterian principles that the congregations of the French, Italian ; and German Christians in London were conducted ; and yet Alasco was highly patronised by King Edward and Archbishop Cranmer. Perhaps this will not seem so wonderful when it is remembered, (and the circumstance itself is a strong testimony in behalf of the Scriptural authority of the office of the Ruling Elder,) that in the reign of this pious monarch, Cranmer, and leading men of the Church of England, actually recommended the adoption of Ruling Elders to that church, a proposal which, humanly speaking, only the short life of the king and the opposition of certain parties prevented from being carried into effect. A few years afterwards, in the reign of Elizabeth, the Rev. Dean Nowell of the Church of England published a well-known catechism, unanimously approved by the same Lower House of Convocation which passed the 39 Articles, in which, treating of the administration of discipline, there is the most distinct recognition of the Ruling Elder as essential. A Presbyterian could scarcely have described the practice of the Presbyterian church more accurately than the catechism describes the appropriate office-bearers for the exercise of discipline. Nay, more, Bishop Burnet of the Church of England states a reason why Ruling Elders were not adopted. It was not because they were without Scripture authority, nor because they were without the sanction of the early church, or were unneeded, (for they were loudly called for;) but because certain political parties demonstrated to the Queen, "that these new models would certainly bring with them a great abatement of her prerogative, since, if the concerns of religion came into popular hands, there would be a power set up distinct from her's, over which she could have no authority. This she perceived well, and therefore resolved to maintain the ancient government of the church, which is Prelatical and Popish."¹

¹ For these and similar testimonies at length, see the admirable 'Plea of Presbytery, by Ministers of the General Synod of Ulster,' pp. 362—365.

The bishop might have added that Presbyterianism was still more ancient. In subsequent reigns the same false views as to the place of the Sovereign, in connection with the church of God, prevented the adoption and spread of Presbyterianism in the South, and occasioned no small share of the suffering of Presbyterians in the North.

I might refer to many other Christian churches and high authorities in confirmation of the views which have been presented; such as the Protestant churches of France, Holland, Geneva, Poland, Germany, Hungary, Transylvania, Scotland, the Presbyterian churches of England, of Ireland, and the United States of America. I might refer also to high names in these churches, and also in the Church of England, in behalf of the Scriptural office of the Ruling Elder; but this is unnecessary. In addition to the names which have been quoted, let me only mention a few others. Of great writers in different churches and countries, who have had occasion to touch on the subject of church government, may be enumerated, in Germany, Luther, Melancthon, Piscator, Pareus, Chemnitius, and the Magdeburg divines; in Holland, Junius, and Salmasius; in Italy, Zanchius; in France, Marloratus, and Dancæus; in Geneva, Calvin and his brethren; in England, in the Establishment, Cartwright; among the Non-Conformists, Ames, Goodwin, and Owen, who has been already named; and among the Independents of America, Cotton, and Mather—the latter of whom explains how the office dropt out of the Congregational Churches of the New World. The duties of Ruling Elder were devolved, not upon several, but on *one* person; and in days of declining Christianity, the elder felt the duty so painful and unpopular, on his own responsibility, to exclude from ordinances and administer discipline, that he abandoned the office, and it went into desuetude. This, however, was a gross misapplication and mismanagement of the office, and contains no just reflection upon the office itself. Men put it on an unscriptural footing.

To use the language of one, who has written ably and well on the subject of the Ruling Elder:¹—“The

¹ Miller, 116, 117.

great body of the Protestant churches, when they came to organise their several systems, in a state of separation from the Papacy and from each other, differing as they did in many other respects, were almost unanimous in adopting and maintaining the office of the Ruling Elder. Instead of this office being confined, as many appear to suppose, to the Ecclesiastical Establishments of Geneva and Scotland, it was generally introduced with the Reformation by Lutherans as well as Calvinists, and is generally retained to the present day in almost all the Protestant churches except that of England.¹ Those of France, Germany, Holland, Switzerland, &c., received this class of elders early, and expressly refer to them in their public Confessions as founded on the Word of God. It is probably safe to affirm, that at the period of the Reformation more than three-fourths of the whole Protestant world declared in favour of this office, not merely as expedient, but as warranted by Scripture, and as necessary to the order and edification of the church. Truly, it is difficult to conceive how any one, who seriously and impartially weighs these facts can resist the impression, that an institution, in behalf of which so many eminently learned and pious men, of different and distant countries, without concert with each other, and without any common interest to serve in reference to the matter, have so remarkably concurred in opinion, must have some solid foundation both in the inspired volume and in the nature and necessities of the church."

¹ Vide Appendix, on Elders in the Continental Churches.

CHAPTER III.

ON THE NATURE AND NECESSITY OF THE OFFICE OF RULING ELDER.

HAVING established the authority of the office of Ruling Elder alike from the testimony of the Word of God, and the practice of the Christian church in primitive and subsequent times, we now naturally come to enquire into the **NATURE** of the office. We have found that there *is* an office of rule distinct from that of the minister in the church of Christ. What is its nature?

First of all, then, it is not a civil office. It has nothing to do with the possession or administration of civil power—that is the province of the civil magistrate. The office, strictly and exclusively, belongs to the church. It regards the inspection, discipline, and government of the members of the church, and that by moral, not civil means. The elder does not discharge his duty by punishing church offenders, where necessary, with civil pains and penalties. No. All that he has to do is, in conjunction with the minister and other members of session, to admonish, warn, reprove, suspend, and, last of all, cut off from the communion of the church. His power extends no farther. In the history of the Christian church, church-officers have sometimes, yea often, gone beyond this. In the Church of Rome, which is Prelatical, and does not recognise the office of the Ruling Elder at all, it has been common to deliver over church offenders from the ecclesiastical to the civil arm—to the punishments of the Inquisition. And even in our own church, particularly in early times, when the civil power was very weak, and the country was in a rough and lawless condition, church offenders were visited with civil pains and penalties by the session; such as fines and corporal inflictions. But however natural the procedure may have been in the

peculiar circumstances in which the church was placed for a season, the principle is indefensible. The weapons of the church are not carnal—they are spiritual ; they consist of moral discipline, and this is the universal practice of the Church of Scotland at the present day. By a recent act of the General Assembly, no money is received, even for the poor, from those who have been the subjects of church censure, lest it should seem as if she were dealing in civil penalties, and also lest any should imagine that, like the Church of Rome, she compounded with men for their sins in consideration of pecuniary acknowledgments.

As to the civil magistrate punishing men for breaches of the law of God,—such as offences against the first table, blasphemy, sabbath-breaking—that is another matter, and proceeds upon other grounds. It is the doing of the State, not of the Church, and because such offences are breaches of the law of the State, and most injurious to its interests ; while, at the same time, they happen also to be breaches of the law of the church, which is founded on the Word of God : thus a man might be punished both by the Church and the State for the same crime. The one might excommunicate him from her pale—the other visit him with a heavy fine. But the two authorities are distinct. This is manifest from the fact, that the church might, and often does, inflict censure where the civil or criminal law sees nothing to blame. The office of the Ruling Elder, then, is not civil. It is strictly ecclesiastical. It deals with ecclesiastical offences, and restrains and punishes them in an ecclesiastical way ; and it rewards and encourages the faithful members of the church also by spiritual, not temporal means—by the diligent discharge of duty, and the prayers and approbation of the good.

But, further, the office of the Ruling Elder is not only ecclesiastical—it is spiritual in its nature. Though an office within the church, it might have been occupied with temporal matters belonging to the church ; such as its finance, and the maintenance of the poor. But, No. It is not identical with the office of the deacon. In practice they may have been conjoined in Scotland and some other Presbyterian countries, but in Scrip-

ture the offices are distinct; and it is desirable, as much as possible, to keep them distinct in practice. The union is attended with various evils, fitted to defeat the ends of the eldership as a spiritual office. At the same time, from the paucity of persons able and willing to discharge the duties of both offices separately, they are frequently united.

And since, then, the office of elder is neither civil, nor affects temporal matters, what is its nature? It is, as I have said, strictly and exclusively, spiritual. It is designed to aid the pastor in the inspection, guidance, and government of the flock, and to promote the edification of all classes connected with the congregation—the young, by seeing that they are religiously educated—the careless, by seeing that they are warned—candidates for admission, by seeing that they are well qualified—offenders against the rules of the church, by seeing that they are dealt with by admonition, suspension, or exclusion—the infirm and the sick, by seeing that they are visited—mourners, by seeing that they are encouraged. Where, (as in an Established church,) in addition to the congregation, there is a territorial division, comprehending many individuals, who are estranged from all Christian churches and communions, growing up in ungodliness, it is the duty of elders, as of ministers, to use all the means in their power to reach and reclaim them, as by schools—week-day and sabbath—and also district visitations. While the elder, as his name intimates, has his appropriate place in the rule or government of the church—as a member of its Sessions, Synods, and, it may be, General Assemblies—these may be regarded as his more *public* duties, but he has, like the minister, various *private* duties, all bearing on the same end—the furtherance of the moral and religious good; in other words, the instruction and edification of the different classes and characters composing the Christian congregation with which he is connected. I need scarcely add, that, in order to the successful discharge of the duties of the office, it is necessary to have some time to spare, and it is necessary also to cultivate some acquaintance with the congregation in which it is exercised.

And now, having explained the nature of the office of the Ruling Elder, let me briefly advert to the ABSOLUTE NECESSITY of such an office in the Christian church. All who have just views of Christianity and of the Christian church will allow that discipline is indispensable—that religious ordinances, such as Baptism and the Lord's Supper, cannot, without mockery and profanation, be granted to all indiscriminately, whatever their character. All will allow that none should be recognised as members of the Christian church save those who make a creditable profession; and that to attain this knowledge demands some time and care. Hence it is obvious that the whole management of the discipline of the church cannot be committed to the hands of one individual, and he the minister. His own peculiar duties, public and private, even in a small congregation, are far too many and onerous to admit of his suitably attending to them all, and the whole discipline of the congregation besides. Hence it is that, where left to the minister alone, as in the Church of England, there is really no discipline. It is not a very pleasant, though a very important employment, to inspect morals, and, where necessary, reprove. Accordingly the duty is neglected, and the very office ultimately disappears.

Independently of the want of time and ability to rule a whole church or parish alone, it is not desirable that so much power should be entrusted to a single individual. Even good men are liable to many mistakes and prejudices, and to be misled by a few injudicious friends. How serious a thing to commit the examination, trial, and acquittal or condemnation of character—in ecclesiastical affairs, to a single individual, without any appeal from his judgment! The very possession of such despotic power would be most injurious to the character of the minister himself, and also of his flock. It would nourish pride and ambition on the one hand, and slavish submission on the other. This has been remarkably verified in the history of the Christian church. As soon as men departed from the Scriptural and apostolic order of having Ruling Elders in each congregation, the pride and ambition of the clergy, as

a distinct order, obtained free scope, and favoured by other adverse influences, at length became the mightiest engine of tyranny which the world ever saw, while the so-called Christian people crouched under them as the most abject slaves. In short, the real character and ends of the Christian church were destroyed. Had it not been for the abandonment of the primitive and Presbyterian order of the church, the world might—we may safely say would—have been spared much of the usurpation and corruption of the Church of Rome.

It is plain, then, that a single individual, however able or excellent, cannot administer aright the government of the church. All history has proved this; and then it is to be remembered that all ministers are not able and excellent. We see, then, the necessity of the pastor being at once assisted and checked by others—and *they* responsible persons—associated with him. And now the question arises, Who shall these others be? The Congregationalists or Independents say that the whole members of the church, young and old, male and female, should bear a part in the government, and, moreover, that there should be no appeal from their judgment, each congregation being independent in itself; but this plan is exposed to insuperable objections. Many persons, though possessed of sufficient knowledge and character to be admissible, with propriety, to church privileges, are totally unfit, from their education, and temper, and habits of thinking, and situation in life, for administering so delicate a matter as the government and discipline of the church of Christ. Think of new converts, in some cases, as in the South seas, constituting the great majority of the congregation, with their imperfect views and newly acquired ideas, becoming at once rulers in the church, to inspect, admonish, reprove, excommunicate others, and receiving as much power as the gravest, most aged, and experienced members! What can be expected to arise out of such a state of things but confusion in the first instance, and then endless divisions and parties? Accordingly this, in a great degree, is the history of such congregations. Humanly speaking, it is only a remarkable outpouring of the Spirit which can prevent the result.

And it would be still more the history, were the professed principles of the Independent body carried out; but this is not the case—they cannot, in fact, be acted on to any great extent. From the unpleasantness of the employment, or other causes, a large body of the members do not regularly or steadily bear a part in the administration of the government of the church, and the exercise of discipline. Consequently these fall into the hands of a few, who may be said really to become the Ruling Elders—but, with this disadvantage, that they are not a recognised or responsible party more than others. Their judgments may be upset without appeal as often as a sufficient number of the members remain to outvote them. Moreover, the persons who in this way fall into the possession of ecclesiastical power are not composed, as in Presbyterian churches, of the men most noted for character and prudence and habits of business, but very often of the self-confident, the ambitious, the rash, in short, the very persons whose temperament specially unfits them for church rule. These are the persons who are most fond of government, and who are most regular and persevering in their attendance, and so become the rulers.

In remarkable harmony with what might have been expected, I believe it is no secret that, in many Independent congregations, both in this and other countries, there is a private committee of the most prudent and able men, who prepare business for the larger body—the church; in other words—real congregational principles are found to be impracticable. The committee substantially become the eldership, and Independent churches are ruled only by having recourse to the principles of Presbyterian ones. It would not avail to repose the whole power in the pastor, and allow him to consult with friends in cases of discipline. Not only would this not meet all the duties of the Ruling Elder, but, being optional, some pastors would consult, others would not. Those with whom they consulted would feel no official responsibility, and very frequently and naturally they would consist of one or two attached friends, who would not run counter to the

pastor's known views and likings, and hence the footing on which the government and discipline of the church would rest would be as unsatisfactory as ever.

There is no real remedy for these various and opposite evils but the eldership of the Presbyterian church—a body of men of approved qualification, invested with a distinct office in the government of the church. And is the appointment of such a body of men more than might have been expected? Surely the Redeemer, who showed such condescension and love to his people, would never leave them in so important a matter as the relationship of church members—a prey to clerical despotism on the one hand, or of confusion, leading to tyranny, on the other. Surely he would make some provision for their being ruled in a comfortable, affectionate, and edifying manner. To adopt the strong language of Dr. Owen, when speaking of Ruling Elders :—"It is evident that neither the purity, nor the order, nor the beauty or glory of the church of Christ, nor the reputation of His own majesty and authority in the government of them, can long be preserved without a multiplicity of elders in them according to the proportion of the respectable members, for their rule and guidance; and for want hereof have the churches of old and of late either degenerated into anarchy and confusion—(their self-rule being managed with vain disputes and janglings unto their division and ruin)—or else giving up themselves to the dominance of some prelatical teachers to rule them at their pleasure, which proved the bane and poison of all primitive churches, and they will, and must do so, in the neglect of this order (namely, of Ruling Elder) for the future."¹

¹ Owen's Gospel Church, p. 178.

CHAPTER IV.

ON THE DUTIES AND QUALIFICATIONS OF THE RULING ELDER.

HAVING established the Scripture authority of the office of the Ruling Elder, and shown the sanction which can be pleaded in its behalf, from the sentiments and practice of the Christian church in primitive and subsequent times; having also shown the nature and absolute necessity for such an office from the nature of the church of Christ, and the proved inability of men to govern it in a satisfactory manner in any other way, I now come shortly to explain the duties and qualifications of the Eldership.

I have already noticed the duties incidentally. As the very name of the office of *Ruling Elder* intimates, its chief and distinguishing peculiarity is that of ruling or governing the church of Christ. The leading *public* duties of the Elder are included under this denomination;—of course, in order to rule a Christian church or congregation satisfactorily and aright, there must be knowledge of the members, inspection of their character and conduct, admonition, advice, reproof, where needed; there must be a care to compose differences where they exist among the members, the visitation of the sick and infirm, attention to the religious education of the young, assisting the minister in the administration of the sacraments, and the exercise of church discipline on offenders, and a general desire and effort to make oneself serviceable in every possible way to the congregation, especially in the furtherance of their spiritual comfort and edification. In addition to these there are the duties of judging in church courts, and conducting the business of the church. Such are the leading public duties of the Elder; and then he has various *private* duties common to him with all Christians, and some peculiar ones rising out of the

ecclesiastical office which he holds. Among these may be reckoned, the duties under which Christians lie to instruct one another—to exhort and stir up one another to love and good works—to admonish one another—to comfort the afflicted and support the weak—to restore the fallen, and visit those who are in distress—and pray one for another. It may be remembered that among the private duties of the Elder, Scripture expressly singles out admonition to the careless believer, and prayer for the afflicted. “We beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you and are over you in the Lord, and *admonish* you.” “Is any sick among you, let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him anointing him with oil, in the name of the Lord”—that is, using all appropriate means for his recovery, while combined with these there is a holy dependence upon God in the exercise of prayer. But the duties are so well stated in Guthrie’s tract, and so fully, that I need not enlarge.

The duties of the Eldership in all Presbyterian churches may often have been very partially and imperfectly discharged, and sometimes they may have fallen into such desuetude as almost to become unknown, so that congregations have ceased to expect them; but in this respect the duties of the Elder have not been more neglected, than oftentimes have been those of the pastor and of the private Christian. In general, religious decline affects all offices and all duties. But, however far Presbyterian churches may have frequently come short of their duty, the office of the Ruling Elder is a permanent one in the church of Christ, and its duties are permanent. Blessed be God there is a growing disposition to revive its duties. These, from the altered circumstances of society, especially in our large towns, may often be of very difficult application—much more difficult than in retired rural parishes, where every man is known to his neighbour, and attends the same parish church. Still, whatever may be the difficulties of the exercise of the office of Elder in our towns and cities, both as regards the congregation and the parish, there can be little question that, to a Christian who has the time and qualification, there is still excellent scope for the exer-

cise of various most useful duties, and these pleasant as well as profitable.

Whatever may have been the neglect and desuetude into which the duties of the Elder have often fallen, both in town and country, let us never forget that, as a whole, the most important services have been rendered by the Eldership of Scotland to the church of their fathers—that many have discharged the highest duties of the office with fidelity and perseverance, even in difficult circumstances; and that many more have discharged the duties to which they more peculiarly devoted themselves in connection with the indigent—to the good of the poor and the advantage of their country—while of almost all it may be said that they have stood by the church when assailed by enemies from without, and proved such a defence as churches not Presbyterian have envied, and wished were enjoyed by themselves.

Passing from the duties of the Ruling Elder, we now come to consider the leading **QUALIFICATIONS** for the office, and the knowledge of the duties will enable us better to judge of the men whom the Church should ever call to the Eldership.

To prevent misapprehensions, I may begin with the negative, by stating that it is not indispensably necessary that an elder be an aged or middle-aged man. The word elder naturally suggests the idea of age, and certainly where all other qualifications can be had, the maturity and Christian wisdom which age generally carries along with it are most desirable. Such age naturally and properly exerts a considerable influence on the session and congregation and society at large—and the influence is a favourable one; but, it is not indispensably necessary. Very frequently, especially in large towns, advancing years are associated with extensive business—such business that, however well disposed and well qualified, the individual cannot with any satisfaction to himself overtake the duties of the Eldership in addition; and this disadvantage is peculiarly felt in the day in which we live, when more is expected of Elders than formerly—when the office is in the course of growing

revival—and when the circumstances of the church and country demand peculiar activity and zeal, and some self-sacrifice on the part of its officers. An indispensable requisite to the discharge of all duty is time, and, we may add, residence. At the same time, let not any entertain exaggerated ideas on the point. Let it not be imagined that the duties of the Elder are such as seriously to encroach on one's leisure. Where the districts or proportions are small, and this can be secured only by the multiplication of Elders, a few hours steadily devoted every week to the parochial duty of the Elder, I have been informed by those who have made successful trial, are sufficient in ordinary circumstances to meet the leading moral and religious wants of the district.

While I thus would guard against the idea that years are *indispensably* necessary to the Elder, I would not, on the other hand, have the reader to forget, that where other circumstances concur, some standing in point of years has various advantages. Young men, though with less business than older ones, are often and naturally anxious to further their prospects in the world, and may thus be as much absorbed with a smaller as others are with a larger business. And then they are untried. However fair and excellent may be their character, it is not known how they will stand the temptations of the world till they have experienced them. From their comparative unacquaintance too with family distresses, they can imperfectly sympathise with those who are bereaved; while yet an important part of their duty as Elders lies among such persons and families. Perhaps it is in some measure to meet the two last, that the word of God recommends that the Elder should be married.

I. Having stated what is not essential to the qualifications of the Elder, I shall now state what qualifications are indispensable. And, 1st, there is piety. All must at once see not only the importance but the necessity of this. Were the office of Elder a mere secular profession, a matter of business connected with the world, piety might be dispensed with; but it is an ecclesiastical office, and concerned about spiritual duties—and

how then can it be exercised with intelligence or profit, or indeed at all, without that piety which springs from the faith of the Gospel, and which consists of love to God and love to man? Piety is as necessary for the Elder as for the minister: without it there may be some of the external forms; but there can be no life or power or pleasure in the office. The Elder cannot be truly respected by the congregation, and he must soon weary of the office itself. It is only the principles and motives of piety which can sustain him amid the difficulties and misapprehensions and misrepresentations to which the discharge of the office frequently exposes. Not only is piety requisite, but, if possible, superior piety. The higher the attainment, the greater the success with which the duties, it may be expected, will be observed. This may not always be attainable, but at least there should be sincere and solid principle manifested in an orthodox creed—irreproachable conduct and a consistent profession of religion. Apart from these a congregation had better want Elders for a time altogether. A man unsound in the faith, without love to God, and consequently really opposed to Christ and his kingdom, is not only quite unfit for the duties of the Eldership whether public or private, but he is a drag and restraint upon the faithful members of session. He hinders their welfare in a variety of ways, such as their fellowship in prayer, and their different schemes for doing good. I cannot better describe this part of the qualification of Elders than in the words of inspiration. They are equally applicable to the ruling as to the teaching Elder, and were, doubtless, designed to mark what should be the character of both. “An elder must be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children; one that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity, not accused of riot or unruly, not self-willed, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre, but a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate, and sound in the faith, in charity, in patience.” Of course, these requirements include the personal virtues, and such duties as family worship, and a regular attendance upon divine ordinances.

Without these piety would lose both the proofs of its existence, and the means of its increase.

2nd. The next qualification for the Eldership is prudence and good judgment. Essential as piety is, it is not enough. All pious men are not wise men. Many are rash and hasty and opinionative, and do much to neutralise the effects of their piety, and perhaps to discredit it. Some, too, are weak in point of mental character. Such persons, however sincere and well-intentioned, are not fit for the Eldership. Good sense and prudence are almost as essential as piety. The duties of Elders, as has been shown, are many and various, some of them delicate and difficult; they concern all classes of character and society, and the management of the house of God besides. Hence they peculiarly call for the exercise of a sound judgment, free from vanity or conceit, or zeal without knowledge. How strong is the Scripture commendation of prudence! Private Christians, and much more office-bearers in the church, are required to be wise as serpents, harmless as doves. Moses, when directing the children of Israel as to the choice of rulers, exhorted them in these words:—"Take ye wise men and understanding, and known among your tribes, and I will make them rulers over you." Suppose church members had the election of civil judges in their hands, would they choose weak or rash or forward men, however sincere and well-intentioned in heart? No. And are such persons more fit for acting the part of ecclesiastical judges? It is to be feared that the rashness and imprudence of good men in the church have often marred their success, and given an occasion to the enemy to find fault, if not to triumph. They have weakened, too, the moral influence of the church of Christ as a whole. Why are Christians endowed with reason, if that reason is not to be exercised? There are gifts as well as graces; but this point is, on all hands, acknowledged to be so clear and important, that I need not enlarge. I shall only add that prudence is peculiarly called for in the day in which we live. When the Church of Scotland has many enemies, and not a few eyes are upon her, watching for her halting and wearying for her fall. Such a qualification, too, is

especially necessary, in an institution like the humble church of our fathers, which has not, like some churches, immense worldly interests on which to lean, which may be said to live purely by character and her public usefulness.

3rd. In the third place, an Elder should not only be a pious and prudent man, but also one well reported of; he should be free from every stain and ground of reproach, and also stand well in public estimation. It is possible for one to be a man of piety and good sense, and yet, from particular circumstances, not to be well reported of. His early life may have been marked with great thoughtlessness and levity, which are not forgotten, or he may conduct his business in such a way as to seem to forget the exhortation to shun "the appearance of evil." The effect of this is to weaken his influence in the Christian congregation and in society, and so to unfit him for the Eldership. We do not say that there is any thing *really* disqualifying, that either in character or conduct he is blame-worthy; but the result is the same as if he were. An Elder needs not only to be good, but to be known, and reported to be good. Without this he will be an object of suspicion, at least there will be a want of general confidence in him; he will not be respected or esteemed, and in the same proportion the ecclesiastical court, of which he forms a member, will suffer in its reputation. It will be exposed to unfounded taunts, and the weight of its deliberations and judgments will be weakened. In the discharge of the duties of his office, the Elder is frequently called upon to hold converse with those who are without, who are not within the pale of the Christian church. In these circumstances his character will be made a subject of rigid scrutiny. It is most desirable that in all the relations of life, and in public estimation, it be such that he can easily and thoroughly stand the trial, and come forth unharmed, yea, unsuspected. It is well, when it can be said, that a church suffers no injury from the Ministers or Elders who administer its affairs. But, after all, this is saying little. The happy state of things is, where it can be said that the church decidedly gains by an Elder, and that,

by his good character, he recommends its interests and claims even to the profane and ungodly.

4th. The next qualification for the eldership is that state of mind, temper, and conduct, comprehended under the name of *public spirit*. The men of the world are eminently selfish in their views, and even good men are often feeble and narrow, contenting themselves with humble attainments and efforts—afraid to do, or to risk much, keeping by a little formal circle of duty, while the great public interests of society—of the church and of the world—are for the most part neglected. This is not the spirit of Christ. He was eminently public spirited. He obeyed—he laboured—he suffered for the good of others. The state of the church and of the world was much upon his heart; so should it be with the rulers in His house. They should seek the things of Christ before, and more highly, than their own. They should mourn for the sins and miseries of the church more than their own. They should rejoice in the prosperity of Zion more than their own. Like old Eli, they should be more troubled for the loss of the ark than for the death of two sons. Like David, they should bewail the conflagration of God's house more than their own—the desolation of the church more than that of a kingdom.¹ It is highly desirable that the Ruling Elder, whose very office is designed to promote Christ's kingdom upon earth, should be eminent for his love to all true Christians, to whatever orthodox communion they belong—should take a deep interest in all schemes of Christian usefulness, particularly those of the church with which he is associated—should not be narrow in his views, or scanty in his contributions, but should cherish a spirit of enlarged benevolence, and be an example to others of generous effort and donation, so far as his circumstances will allow; and of anxious desire and prayer for the universal extension of the kingdom of Christ; and, generally, for the furtherance of every good object—humane and religious. This is peculiarly called for in the present day, which teems with enterprisings of Christian benevolence. How sad, where the office-bearers of the church are afraid to

¹ Vide *Vindication of Presbyterial Church Government*, p. 80. London, 1650.

move for Christ—cold, timid, half-asleep—correct and excellent men, it may be, in their families and little circles, but without interest, sympathy, or prayer, for the great objects of Christianity on a large and public scale! If the rulers of the church be wanting in public spirit, what can be expected of the private members? Truly they will be cold and indifferent, too, and miss the blessing which is promised to those who mind not only their own things, but also the things of Christ.

5th. Another qualification for the eldership is an enlightened attachment to the principles and constitution of the Church of Scotland, as a Presbyterian evangelical church in union with the State. The very names—*Evangelical Presbyterian Establishment*—recall various important questions. They remind us that the church to which we belong is an Evangelical church, as opposed to various errors—defective views and false doctrines entertained in other churches, and once too current in our own. They remind us that it is a Presbyterian church, as opposed to forms of government which, however venerated, are unsupported by Scripture and the history of the church, and are inexpedient in themselves; and they remind us that it is an Established church, as opposed to those who deny the claims of Christ as King of nations as well as of individuals and churches; maintaining, on the other hand, that it is the duty of men, in all relations of life, the civil as well as others, to recognise and promote the truth and church of the living God. In any circumstances, it is most important that all elders should have some measure of intelligent acquaintance with these great characteristics of the Church of Scotland; but in the days in which our lot is cast, this is eminently called for. It is well known that ecclesiastical questions, long asleep, are, from various causes—the progress of evangelical religion, and the political state of society—coming up again for discussion, and that Christians of all denominations are called upon anew to examine their principles, and hold fast by that which is scriptural and good. At such a season, it is peculiarly necessary that office-bearers in the church, who are expected to defend her when

assailed, should have a tolerable acquaintance with, and be animated with warm attachment to, her principles and institutions. To whom are men to look in the varied walks of society, in private life as well as social intercourse, for able supporters, if not to the Elders? And blessed be God, in the church's various struggles in every age, down to the present day, she has been nobly sustained by many of her elders: they have been among her foremost defenders. I do not say that elders should be mere partisans, and in all questions follow the majority of the church, whoever these may happen to be. That were unreasonable in itself, and injurious to their own influence; but, as compared with other churches, I humbly think, those who are called to the eldership in the Church of Scotland should be men of warm and enlightened attachment to her great distinguishing peculiarities; and that in a contest which divides her own members, the evidence should be very clear—the result of prayerful investigation, and not mere haste and prejudice, which decides them to pursue a course entirely opposite to that of the great majority of their brethren.

In connection with this point, and flowing out of it, I may add, that the elder, while tolerant and liberal to all good men, should make it his care specially to countenance the church to which he belongs, and by the regularity of his attendance in the congregation of which he is an elder—by the interest which he takes in its schools, its prayer meetings, and its different religious objects; so far as circumstances will allow, he should encourage the minister and the other office-bearers, in the great work for which they are associated together as a church of Christ.

I need not say how unhappy it is, in every light, when elders, of whom other things might have been expected, are ignorant or indifferent about the principles of the church, allow her to be attacked without challenge, and take little or no interest in her general proceedings, or in the religious concerns of the particular congregation to which they belong.

6th. The last grand qualification for the eldership is a devotional spirit—the spirit of prayer. The duties of

elder, when faithfully and unweariedly discharged, are so many, and some of them so difficult—the office is exposed to such varied opposition from the wicked and ungodly, and the discharge of its duties is attended with such opposite temptations to neglect, or impatience, or severity—that the elder needs to be upheld by better wisdom than his own, or that of his brethren. He needs the counsel, strength, and blessing of the Great Head of the church, and these are to be had only in answer to prayer. Moreover, it is only those of a devotional spirit who can be expected, when necessary, to pray with the sick, and to form a part of any association for prayer in the session or in the congregation, for a blessing on the labours of the office-bearers of the church. Hence the importance of a prayerful spirit. Besides, it will sweeten all the duties of the eldership, whether more or less public, and make them pleasant. It will prevent the elder also from wearying in his labours, or being discouraged by, it may be, seeing little visible fruit from them all.

I have now noticed the leading qualifications for the successful discharge of the duties of the Ruling Elder—personal piety—good sense and prudence—being well-reported of—public spirit—intelligent attachment to the constitution and principles of the church—and a devotional temper; combined together, they form a most useful and excellent character, which will command the respect and esteem of all Christian men. In describing the character of the elder—a scriptural office concerned about spiritual things—I have endeavoured to be faithful; but let none, who may be called by Christian congregations to undertake the duties, lightly decline them on the score of inability, or unworthiness. Not a few may have held the office in the Presbyterian church who were quite unsuitable—that, however, is no reason for men who possess the substantial qualifications of the office refusing its duties. It is desirable to see and cherish a deep sense of one's own weakness and insufficiency. This is a good preparation for the discharge of duty—a far better preparation than self-confidence. It indicates some just appreciation of the true nature of the office, and it will lead

to prayer and dependence on God. The unsolicited call, too, of a Christian congregation, coming as the voice of Providence, is not to be hastily or easily set aside. Men, especially at first, may not be very well fitted for *all* the duties of the eldership. If, however, they at all approach to the character I have described, they will be equal to many ; and, it may be hoped that, seeking God's guidance and blessing, they will gradually become better fitted for others, yea, for all. The days in which we live are days in which every man of principle, who has an obvious call to public duty, should embrace it. They are not days in which duty may be put away from him, and devolved upon others. If he acts upon this feeling, without good reason, others may do, and will do, the same, and the consequence will be that the office, with its important duties, will fall into less qualified hands, and the influence of the Church upon society proportionally be deteriorated. Even those who have a large share of secular business to manage should not lightly refuse such an office with the opportunities for Christian usefulness which it brings along with it. If a good man is necessarily much occupied with worldly business, he should be glad of something which will insure that all his time and talent shall not be devoted to business—which shall provide that God shall be directly glorified, and his fellow-Christians directly benefitted, by some portion of his time and labour. Such a reflection as this will be pleasant both now, and in the prospect of death. Many duties seem formidable at a distance, which prove manageable when the trial is made : and I have little doubt that such will be the experience of all faithful, well qualified men, who are at present disposed to shrink from the eldership—when they actually make trial of its duties.

CHAPTER V.

OBJECTION ANSWERED—SCRIPTURE AUTHORITY FOR COURTS OF REVIEW, AND THE RULING ELDER HAVING A SEAT IN THEM.

I HUMBLY apprehend, from what has been stated, that it is pretty plain the office of Ruling Elder, as a permanent office in the Christian church, is supported by the voice of Scripture and of the primitive church. But here an objection is started—"If Ruling Elders thus formed a component part of the government of the early church, why do we not find their names in General and Provincial councils?" This may be a difficulty, supposing the fact to be as stated; but a mere negation cannot set aside the positive proof which has been adduced. It is to be remembered that the primitive church was early and most extensively corrupted, and that the first general council was not held till A.D. 325,—that little is known of many of the earlier provincial councils save that they were held, and gave judgment on certain points—that nearly a century and a half elapsed from the death of Christ before any council was held at all. It is to be considered, too, that an encroaching prelatic spirit—the root of much of the subsequent evil—early manifested itself, and that the natural operation of this spirit is to exclude the Ruling Elder from deliberation in church courts, or at least render his presence uncomfortable to himself, and so to lead to his withdrawal. Besides, if the existence of Ruling Elders in the primitive church is to be denied on the ground which is stated, it will be necessary also to deny the existence of Presbyters—church officers, whom the Church of England recognises: the great Popish champion Bellarmine has shown in a way that will be satisfactory to many Episcopalian, that prelates alone have power to sit and vote in councils.¹ The

¹ See Anderson's Defence of Presbyterian Church Government, p. 208.

only satisfaction which can be found amid such uncertainties and conjectures is in the infallible Word of God. On turning to its pages, we meet with ample evidence that Ruling Elders had a seat and a vote in the earliest, and noblest, and most authoritative Ecclesiastical council which was ever held—I allude to the General Assembly or Synod at Jerusalem, whose proceedings are recorded in the 15th chapter of the Acts of the Apostles.

As elders are not merely members of the kirk-session of the congregation with which they are connected, but are eligible to, and always constitute an important part of superior church courts—such as Presbyteries, Synods, and General Assemblies—in the Presbyterian church: and as courts of appeal and review now substantially constitute as real a peculiarity of Presbyterian church government as the office of the Ruling Elder itself, neither Episcopalian nor Independents in this country, as they once did, recognising their authority, at least professedly—so; in meeting the objection which I am at present considering, it may not be out of place shortly to refer to the Scripture authority for church courts or councils. This will be a complete answer to the objection, that the names of Ruling Elders do not appear on the records of the councils of the primitive church. I do not here refer to the principles of appeal and representation as found in all enlightened civil governments: nor to the example of the Jewish church, where there was a gradation of ecclesiastical courts. I refer to the New Testament. Turning to the 15th chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, what do we find?

It appears that, from early times, there was a Christian church at Antioch, that Paul and Barnabas visited it in the course of their missionary labours, and remained there for a considerable season, informing the members with gratitude and joy of the success of their preaching among the Gentiles. While the apostles were at Antioch, certain men, apparently office-bearers, teachers in the Christian church, came down from Judea, and with the imperfect views then existing, taught the people that they could not be

saved unless they were circumcised, after the manner of Moses ; in short, that Judaism must be conjoined with Christianity. This, as might have been expected, created a great stir and much disputation at Antioch, where the church, we may believe, was composed both of Jews and Gentiles. Paul and Barnabas laboured to the uttermost to put an end to this question, by stating that it was not necessary to salvation that men should be circumcised; but when the controversy still continued, instead, as we might have imagined, of terminating the dispute by the exercise of their inspired and apostolic authority (which would have been quite satisfactory), they judged it better that it should be made a matter of appeal, and sentence by the church courts. This put honour upon the government of the church by courts of appeal and review. Besides, it was not indispensably necessary to have recourse to inspiration or supernatural wisdom. The case could be determined otherwise, and hence ordinary means were applied.

It was resolved that "Paul and Barnabas, and certain others of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and Elders about this question."—The whole church at Antioch, man and woman, did not go. There were only representatives or commissioners appointed on the errand, and among these were Paul and Barnabas. This is quite in accordance with the principles of Presbyterian government. In all probability the church court at Antioch was equivalent to a Presbytery, composed of the Elders, teaching and ruling, in the different congregations in it and its vicinity. As might be imagined, from the nature of the question under discussion, there was general and deep interest on the subject, and it was not concealed from private Christians. Though the settlement was committed to office-bearers, yet it was universally made known to the members of the church and spoken of. Hence the interest which the church as a whole is represented as feeling and manifesting in the case. It is said, that the representatives or commissioners from Antioch "being brought on their way by the church,"—having received all countenance and assistance, "they passed through Phenice and Samaria, de-

claring the conversion of the Gentiles, and caused great joy to all the brethren; and when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders there, (after what has been proved, we hold that the word Elder denotes both the Pastor and the Ruling Elder) and they declared all things that God had done with them." This is all very natural and pleasing; but as yet there is no act of the church court at Jerusalem; this, however, is soon called for. Some of the believing Pharisees holding the same sentiments with the brethren who had gone down to Antioch—at a meeting, which was convened at Jerusalem, on the arrival of the commissioners, rose up and said, that, in their opinion, it was essential to salvation that men should be circumcised, and keep the law of Moses. Here a question in which the whole church of Christ is deeply concerned was started at Jerusalem, the very head quarters of Christianity; and what in these circumstances was done? Was there an immediate appeal to the inspired wisdom of the apostles, or of any one of them? This would at once have been decisive of the controversy—but No. Was there, then, an appeal to the whole body of the church members, man and woman, young and old? On the principles of the Congregationalists, this should have been the course which should have been pursued, but there is nothing of the kind. It is expressly said, "*and the apostles and elder came together to consider of this matter.*" The apostles, not in the character of apostles, but as Christian ministers, and the Elders, composed of Teaching and Ruling Elders, were the only persons who were competent to decide the question; and hence they and no others came together to deliberate.

After a good deal of discussion, Peter, probably as the eldest apostle, rose up and delivered his judgment, founded on what he had met with in the course of his experience, against laying any Jewish burden on the Gentiles. Paul and Barnabas next related their experience, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them, and pointing to the same conclusion. It is said, that when they spake, "all the multitude kept silence," which shows that the

discussion, in which the church generally was deeply interested, was conducted not in the absence, but in the presence of a large body of church members. This was quite natural and proper; *but it by no means follows that the multitude had any voice in the matter.* We have seen that the consideration was limited to the apostles and elders, and it is common still for questions of great public interest to be discussed by Presbyteries, Synods, and General Assemblies, in the presence of large bodies of the Christian people. James next gave forth his judgment, and appealed to Scripture prophecy in behalf of his views, just as any faithful and intelligent office-bearer of the church might do at the present day. There is no appeal to inspiration or apostleship on the part of any of those who were invested with both—they speak and judge simply as ministers of the church. James's opinion agreeing with that of the other apostles and elders, the judgment seems to be unanimous; and it is to this effect, that “no burden be laid upon the Gentiles, and that they be simply but authoritatively written to abstain from pollutions of idols, and from things strangled, and from fornication;” things to which they were peculiarly exposed, and which were peculiarly fitted to offend their Christian Jewish brethren. The sentence then is passed, the deed of church deliberation and authority is complete; and it is begun and carried forward and ended by apostles and Elders alone.

Now we come to consider the steps which were taken to make it known for the guidance of the churches—*an entirely different matter from the authoritative forming of the judgment itself.* It is described in these words: “Then pleased it the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their company to Antioch, with Barnabas and Paul,” to proclaim the result. Here the whole church members were included with the apostles and Elders. They had manifested a deep interest in the case; many of them probably had come up from Antioch to witness the proceedings: they had been present also at the discussion. In these circumstances, it was not unnatural that they should be taken along with the office-bearers, when they pro-

ceeded to consider in what way to make known the decision, and that their approval should be signified as well as that of the Apostles and Elders. There would be nothing inconsistent with the principles of the Presbyterian church, were our General Assembly in a similar case, to act in a similar manner—to come to a decision in the presence of the Christian people, and knowing their approbation of the decision, to notice this in any written statement to others. Instead of saying “the apostles, elders, and brethren, send greeting to the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia,” they might say “The General Assembly of the ministers and Elders of the Church of Scotland, with the Christian people assembled, send their Christian regards to their brethren.” The two great points to be kept in view are—1st, That the deliberate and authoritative sentence was the deed, not of the multitude or of the apostles as apostles, but of the office-bearers of the church, Ministers and Ruling Elders. At best the multitude only consented, they did not judge. And, 2ndly, That there was an appeal from an inferior to a superior court—a court guided not by inspiration or giving forth mere advice, but of review and authority—an appeal from the Presbytery of Antioch to the Synod or General Assembly of Jerusalem. These two points are plain, and they contain all that is necessary for the vindication of Presbyterian church government in the matter of church courts, and of Ruling Elders sitting in them. The proceedings which we have been surveying are inexplicable upon any other theory of church rule, save the Presbyterian. They are inconsistent alike with Prelacy and Congregationalism. It is of no consequence to the argument, whether the court at Jerusalem was a Presbytery, or a Synod, or a General Assembly. The grand point is, that it had authority over particular churches or congregations, and that the determination of the question of Jewish ceremonies—a great and most important question—was referred to it by an inferior court at Antioch.

Reviewing the whole proceedings as related in the chapter, we may notice the leading points, following in this the order of the admirable statement by the Rev.

Mr. Muir of Paisley, in his ‘Synod of Jerusalem, or Courts of Review’ published in 1767.

1st. There was a Christian church at Antioch : in all probability a number of churches. There is no doubt of the fact of one church; and when we remember that Antioch was a large town, that the apostles were frequently there and the Gospel successful, there seems every reason to believe that there must have been several. There may have been but one place of assembling. This was frequently the case even in large towns, as Carthage ; but there must have been several, if not many congregations, meeting in the same place at different hours. Here, then, is the foundation for a Presbytery. There are several congregations, and yet they are styled but one church.

2nd. The next point is, that the office-bearers in the church at Antioch, as distinct from the church members, had a right to give judgment in an important question which had arisen, and as to which prophets and teachers could not agree. They are recognised as equal to pronounce a judgment. There is no calling in question of their power or authority. Indeed the same parties are shortly before required by the Holy Spirit to separate the apostles Barnabas and Paul to the work to which they had been called ; and after fasting and prayer, they put their hands on them and sent them away. Here was as solemn an act of judgment as any to which they could as a church court be called. If they were equal to this, they could not be unequal to the other. The very design of a church court was to take up and determine such cases.

3rd. But, again, it appears that, though well warranted to pronounce a judgment themselves, they were aware that in cases of disagreement, their decisions were liable to be reviewed by a superior court ; and hence they unanimously referred the cause now before them to the Synod of Jerusalem or Judea. From what is related, it is obvious that there was, through commissioners, a reference—a reference by an inferior to a superior court—and a reference in order to obtain such a decision as would effectually bind all concerned,

not only the church of Antioch, but all other churches where, as in Syria and Cilicia, the same question was agitated. If the court of Jerusalem were not superior in authority to that at Antioch, there was no need for appealing the case. It is plain the reference was not made merely for the sake of advice. The judgment, which was given forth is not called a counsel, or exhortation, or recommendation, but “*a decree*”—in other words, an authoritative sentence.

4th. The point which next presents itself is, that after the commissioners had reached the metropolis and opened up the question, the court at Jerusalem *first* reasoned upon it, and then came to a unanimous judgment. This indicates the proceeding of a court; and who composed that court? Not the multitude of private brethren. They were, as I have said, deeply interested in the discussion, and full information was afforded them on the subject. But it is the apostles and Elders only who came together to consider it. The multitude had no place as judges in the case. Besides the evidence of this furnished in the chapter before us, we have similar testimony in the 16th and 21st chapters of the same book. Speaking of Paul’s future proceedings, the historian says, that “he went through the cities delivering to them the *decrees* to keep, which were ordained”—by whom? by the multitude of the brethren? private Christians? No; but by “the apostles and Elders who were at Jerusalem;” and seven years later, a similar testimony was borne by the apostle Paul, who, referring to this case says, in the presence of the assembled Elders—“*We have written and concluded,*” i. e. we Apostles and Elders, that in the matter of the Jewish ceremonies, ye do nothing more than abstain from the things forbidden.

5th. The next and last step to be marked in the history is, that two of the commissioners from Antioch, joined by two from Judea, were immediately despatched with letters to the Gentile converts, containing an account of the Synodical judgment, and that the Gentile converts, on receiving and reading the letter, were filled with joy—to use the language of inspiration, “rejoiced for the consolation.” All this is natural and proper in

itself, and most orderly in its proceeding, and blessed in its result. It was for the peace and welfare of the church that the question was discussed and decided upon at all. Not merely the church at Antioch, but the whole churches of that district of country, including Syria and Cilicia, were equally interested in the question, and were warmly alive to it. Hence the importance of sending a regular and accredited account of the judgment of the apostles and elders, and not leaving the matter to random and inaccurate informants. Besides, there had been an appeal, and the proper answer to an appeal is a judgment regularly executed and sent to the parties. We may notice the advantage of such courts of appeal and review—"The churches rejoiced for the consolation." Had the question not been settled, or settled by mere advice, without authority, there might have been—in all probability there would have been—protracted discussion; but the judgment coming forth as the judgment of lawful superiors in the Lord, no sooner did the decision reach the churches than—denied to all preconceived opinion—they unanimously considered themselves as present before God, solemnly and reverently read the epistle, and heartily subscribed to the judgment which it conveyed. The language is strong—"rejoiced for the consolation." It implies that there had been anxiety, agitation, discord before, and it expresses acceptance, approbation, gratitude, humility, delight, and resolution now. To use the language of Mr. Muir's excellent pamphlet—"of acceptance as faithful and true—of approbation as suitable and excellent—of gratitude for the preciousness—humility for the freeness—delight for the sweetness, of the blessing—and of resolution, through grace, to reduce the will of the decree instantly, uniformly, and perpetually to practice."¹

We have plainly seen, then, the Scripture warrant for church courts—courts of appeal and review, and final decision, in which Ruling Elders have a seat. The number of these courts, and extent of jurisdiction—the time and place of meeting—may all, like many other things in the administration of the church, under all forms of government, be left to the wisdom

and discretion of the church herself, in different ages and countries; but the principle is scriptural, indestructable, ever-living; and where do we find it in any suitable strength or expression save in the Presbyterian church?

We have seen the advantage of courts of review, as illustrated in the case of Antioch. In every age of the Christian church there have been Councils and Assemblies, whose decisions have been attended with good results; but in the vast majority of cases, particularly in the middle and latter ages, these have not been regular courts—always sitting—preventing incipient error and evil, and promoting the interests of divine truth and Christian institutions—but mere Assemblies hastily called together to meet rising emergencies. Hence they achieved little good; nay, when the church became corrupt, they often proved eminently the patrons of heresy and superstition. But church courts, properly so called—a regular part of the government—vested in superior and inferior bodies—have been most beneficial in their operation in maintaining the truth and purity of the church. They may not have succeeded always in keeping heresy and schism out, or in always keeping alive the life and power of true religion within the church. Error and declension have broken through, and will break through all kinds of form and government and discipline; but they have done much towards the accomplishment of these great and blessed ends. Very frequently, where false doctrine and decay have appeared in the Christian church, they can be traced to a previous departure from the principles of Presbyterian government, or to the decline of its spirit, even while its forms are retained. This was remarkably the case both in England and America. The Protestant Dissenters of England did not become Arian and Socinian in doctrine till they had ceased to be Presbyterian, and had become Independent in church government; and so of the Socinians of New England in America. There is scarcely one Socinian church in the State of Connecticut where Presbyterian church government and discipline have been kept healthy and strong. There are a hundred, in the adjoining State of

Massachusetts, where Presbyterianism has been allowed to decay in the church, and to be supplanted by Independency. The history of false doctrine in Ireland is similar—the spirit of Presbytery was destroyed, though the forms remained, ere Arianism lifted its head and prevailed. It was when Presbytery revived, and its discipline was put in force, that false doctrine was purged out. The Presbyterian church of that land has ever since been rising in its power and usefulness.

Nor, after all, is this connection between Presbyterian church government and sound doctrine and unity a matter of wonder or surprise. It is quite natural, and rises out of the very constitution of things. To use the language of an old but able writer, frequently quoted—Gillespie:—"Without a subordination among ecclesiastical courts, and the authority of the higher above the inferior, it were utterly impossible to preserve unity, or to make an end of controversy in a nation. A particular congregation might happily end questions and controversies betwixt the members thereof, and so keep unity within itself, (and not so either, if the one-half of the congregation be against the other;) but how shall controversies betwixt several congregations be determined, if both of them be independent? how shall plurality of religions be avoided? how shall an apostatizing congregation be amended?" And, again:—"What I have said of congregations, I say also of classes or Presbyteries. How shall sentence be given between two Presbyteries at variance? how shall a divided Presbytery be reunited in itself? how shall an heretical Presbytery be reclaimed? how shall a negligent Presbytery be made to do their duty? how shall a despised Presbytery have their wounded authority healed again? In these, and such like cases, what remedy can be had but the authority of Synods"¹—or, we might add, General Assemblies?

Thus do we see not only the great importance and advantage of a gradation of church courts, but the necessity of them to the maintenance of the two great ends for which church government has been instituted—sound doctrine, and unity of faith and worship.

¹ Assertion of the Church Government, &c., p. 189.

Where men do not care for these—where they are indifferent about orthodoxy and unity—they may do without Presbyterianism; but where they are truly anxious for their preservation, and use means for their defence, they will find, perhaps without being aware of it, that they are driven substantially to Presbyterian principles and government.

In concluding these arguments, drawn from Scripture and church history, in behalf of the divine authority of the office of the Ruling Elder, is it possible to forget the presumption—to use no stronger term—of the new semi-popish school in the Church of England, who unchurch all Presbyterian churches, committing the salvation of their members to the “uncovenanted mercies of God”—mercies which are unscriptural, and have no existence? These parties disown an office clearly revealed in the Word of God, and recognised in that primitive antiquity in which they so greatly delight; and yet, because the Church of Scotland, and other Presbyterian churches, cannot boast of, yea, deny, and do not believe in the scriptural authority of ordination exclusively by diocesan bishops;¹ and still less, that these ordinations have descended, without a break or a flaw, for eighteen hundred years, through ages of confusion and corruption—because Presbyterian churches do not credit such absurd and monstrous pretensions, they are forthwith unchristianised, and all their ordinances pronounced invalid and blasphemous! All the while, these “accusers of the brethren,” who “call themselves apostles, and are not, but are liars,” are administering a church without, yea, in open disregard of, a church officer, who was set there by the Lord of the church, and whose place has been recognised and honoured by the most distinguished Reformers of the Church of England, as well as by the fathers of the primitive church of Christ. The same parties belong to a church which has not

¹ They have a Presbyterial ordination as unbroken, or more so than the ministers of the Church of England have an Episcopal one.

only blotted out the Ruling Elder, but which has perverted the Scripture office of deacon, raising it from the simple and scriptural charge of the financial affairs of the church and of the poor to the high office of preaching the Gospel, and baptizing in the name of the Holy and Blessed Trinity! Far be it from me to deny that the Church of England is a church of Christ. With all her defects, she is an important branch of the Protestant Reformation. She has rendered many services to Christianity, against Popery, Socinianism, and Infidelity, and her doctrinal articles are unexceptionable. In all periods—even those most strictly and sternly Presbyterian—her claims to the character of a church of Christ have been recognised by the Church of Scotland; but surely her professed friends have enough to do to supply her acknowledged defects, and work out her further reformation, and maintain their own consistency, without unchurching their neighbours, and creating alienation where there should be concord! I rejoice it is only a party—I hope not a very large party—in her communion, who feel and speak in so obnoxious a manner. It will be time enough to yield to their claims of “uninterrupted episcopal succession” when the Church of England has returned to primitive order, by restoring the Ruling Elder and Presbyter to their proper place in the church, and by reducing the deacon from his usurped powers. Instead of calling in question the validity of Presbyterian ordinances, it would be a more natural and profitable enquiry for the new Oxford school and their associates to enquire, whether Episcopal ordinances are what they ought to be, while the office of the Ruling Elder is not recognised—that of the Presbyter shorn of its power—and that of the deacon perverted? The tree must surely be sound and good before its “unbroken succession” can be of much worth. At least such enquiries would tend to create a little toleration for others, who, on many accounts, have a title to forbearance, if not respect and gratitude.

CHAPTER VI.

HISTORICAL SKETCH OF THE ELDERSHIP IN THE CHURCH
OF SCOTLAND, EMBRACING A BRIEF VIEW OF THE LAW
OF THE CHURCH REGARDING ELECTION, AND THE
ADVANTAGES WHICH HAVE BEEN BROUGHT OUT BY
THE OFFICE.

THERE was a Presbyterian church in Scotland prior to the days of Popery. The Culdees were its ministers—faithful and devoted men—who had only Presbyterian ordination, and who, sad to tell for “the unbroken succession,” actually ordained English bishops! Doubtless, the Ruling Elder held an appropriate place in the government of this early Scottish church. At the Reformation, in the sixteenth century, the same government was revived—not as an invention of man’s, but as the dictate of Scripture authority.¹ Accordingly

¹ No mistake can be greater than that the Church of Scotland, in drawing up her platform of government and order, was guided by human policy—the circumstances of the times—and the opinions of great men. It is plain to all who carefully study her history, that never was a church which more directly drew from the Word of God. This is well stated in a rare Tract, published in 1614, by the Commissioners of the General Assembly to the Assembly of Divines in England, intended to clear the reformation of church government in Scotland “from some mistakes and prejudices.” The Tract was probably written by Alexander Henderson. I subjoin a few sentences. Speaking of the Scottish Reformers, the Commissioners say:—“They did honour Luther and Calvin, and many others, whether their predecessors or contemporaries, who had heart or hand, especially in an eminent degree, in the blessed work of reformation. For their direction they made use of the light which such notable servants of Jesus Christ did hold forth in doctrine and discipline; and, in all thankfulness, they did desire and wish that their names might be had in everlasting remembrance. Nor was it possible that so great an alteration as the corrupt state of the church required could be effected and not carry some remembrance of the instruments—but for this, to call us Calvinians, and the Reformed churches Calvinian Re-

the First Book of Discipline recognises the office of Ruling Elder as an important part of the government of the Christian church; and the church acted upon her own convictions in clothing suitable men with the office. The first General Assembly consisted of twelve ministers, and thirty Ruling Elders. The first church of Edinburgh had twelve elders, and sixteen deacons. A striking feature in the early eldership of the Church of Scotland was its numbers. Often it seems to have embraced all the leading men of the district—persons of rank as well as of character. In Glasgow, a few years after the Reformation, when there was only one church, there were not less than forty-two elders, and twenty-four deacons—the former comprehending the magistrates and council of the town, and the Principal and Regents of the University.¹ This must have afforded great encouragement to a faithful minister in labouring to promote the moral and religious welfare of his people. The office was originally annual—the same persons, however, were eligible by re-election. So important was it regarded, and so thoroughly spiritual its duties, that it was contemplated to make provision for the maintenance of the elder from the funds of the parish—at least, while he sacrificed his business to his office. This part of the original plan the church was never in circumstances to carry into full or permanent effect.

The election to the office was vested in the congrega-

formed churches, is to disgrace the true churches of Christ, and to symbolise with the Papists, who call themselves the Catholic church." Again—"Nothing was farther from their thoughts and intentions than to frame in their own forge a Lesbian rule answerable to any particular form of civil polity, or compliable with State ends—that they looked with singleness of mind to the rule of Scripture, we give these evidences:—1. The great pains they took in searching the will of God; and after they had found it, their grievous sufferings from the civil authority in defence thereof" The other proofs are the restless opposition of worldly men to Presbyterian church government, alleging it to be incompatible with monarchy, and the assertion of the true polity of the church by her ministers, "demonstrating that it was in itself unalterable—*because divine*."

¹ Vide Supplement to article, Glasgow, in New Statistical Account.

tion. The New Testament supplies us with examples of the popular appointment of the highest and the lowest offices in the church—those of the Apostle and the Deacon. It is in accordance with the ways of God to teach us from such cases how to appoint to other offices—those of the Pastor and Ruling Elder. The Scriptures treat men as rational and intelligent creatures; and hence deal rather in general principles than in formal and specific directions. In the faith of these things, the Reformers gave the election of the Ruling Elder to the members of the congregation in which he was to be called to labour. When the Second Book of Discipline was adopted, the existing kirk-session nominated a large number to the people—the people being also at liberty to add to the leet—and from this general number the congregation made choice of a smaller number to discharge the duties of the office for the year. The people, too, had the power of objecting to any who were proposed by the session for the larger leet, and of setting them aside. There seems no reasonable doubt that the election to the eldership was an essentially popular election. Such was the early practice of the church. The First Book of Discipline, while it bears testimony to the high Christian character required of elders, testifies also to their free election:—"Men of best knowledge in God's word, and cleanest life, and faithful, and of most honest conversation that can be found in the kirk, must be nominate to be in election; and their names must be publicly read to the whole kirk by the minister giving them advertisement that from amongst them must be chosen elders and deacons. If any of those nominated be noted with public infamy, he ought to be repelled, for it is not seemly that the servant of corruption should have authority in the kirk of God. *If any man know others of better qualities within the kirk than those that be nominate, let them be put in election with them that the kirk may have the choice.*" We know from an interesting document in Dunlop's Confessions of Faith, "On the Election of Elders and Deacons in the Church of Edinburgh, 1560," that the plan sketched in the First Book of Discipline was no mere speculation or good intention, but was actually observed

in the church of Edinburgh—the leading church of the country, whose minister was John Knox, the great Reformer. Nor is this the only evidence which we possess. The practice was not confined to the church of the metropolis. Twenty years later,¹ when some question had arisen as to the election of elders, and congregations were anxious for guidance, the General Assembly expressly and authoritatively approved and recommended the Edinburgh practice, in these words:—“Concerning a *general order* of admission to the office of elder, refers to the order used at Edinburgh, *which we approve.*” This was subsequently to the adoption of the Second Book of Discipline—indeed, shortly after. Hence, its provisions must be understood in harmony with the above “order.” As that order is the *last* act of the church regarding the election of elders, we are entitled to say, that the present written *law* distinctly recognises popular election to the office. And there is nothing in after times at variance with this law.

The only act of Assembly which at first sight seems to sanction the common practice of the existing session electing the new elders is an act comprehended in a single sentence, in 1642. But Mr. Dunlop² has satisfactorily shown that the “old session electing the new, in burgh and land,” and supplying vacancies in the session, does not refer to the *primary* election of elders from out of the congregation, but to the *calling* of men who had been previously elected, according to the First Book of Discipline, into the actual *service* of the church. In short, the existing session are required to supply vacancies in their number, and to choose their successors from the larger list of elders whom the congregation had previously chosen. Hence it is plain, that the popular election of elders was left entire. Indeed, no one who is acquainted with the spirit of the church or country in 1642 will readily believe that that was a period when just popular privileges were curtailed. Whatever then may have been the practice of the church in after times, and particularly in later days, there is not only nothing *against* the popular appointment of elders; but, so far as the constitution and law of the church are

¹ 1582.

² Presbyterian Review, Nov. 1834, pp. 39, 40.

concerned, both expressly provide for it. No minister or kirk-session, then, may have any scruple in returning to the old practice of the church. There is no law against them; and there is law in their favour. It is certain that nothing in the shape of law can be shown for the general practice of later times.

The following may be given as cases of popular election at a late period:—

“*2nd April, 1733.*—The Session of Dunfermline having met for prayer, as is usual, on the first Monday of the month; and after some time spent in prayer, they having entered on the consideration of an addition to the number of the Elders, and having read the list of persons (formerly prepared by themselves), they agreed on the following leet, viz. (18 names), whereupon the Elders were appointed, to make enquiry in the several quarters of the parish, if the foresaid persons be the people’s choice, and can be constituted Elders by their consent, and to report their diligence thereanent.”

“*12th April, 1733.*—The Session resuming the consideration of the foresaid leet of persons for Elders, the several members present gave account to the Session that they had mostly gone through their several quarters, and found that the foresaid leet nominated for being Elders were the choice of the generality of all the heads of families in the quarters to which they severally belong; and that, besides the foresaid leet, some others were nominate to them by the people, of whom the Session were well pleased to add to the former leet these following, viz. (four names). These being more generally recommended—them the Session recommended, the ministers and Elders present, that they take occasion to speak and commune with the persons nominate, and advertise them of this design.”

“*26th April, 1733.*—Two more names added to the leet of persons to be Elders.”

“*29th April, 1733.*—The Session again considering the leet of persons nominate for Elders, thought fit to add James Orchitt, and appoint the members to speak with the said persons betwixt and Wednesday next; and also appoints their officer to acquaint them to wait

on their ministers, and such of the Elders as can conveniently attend on Wednesday, the 2nd May, at two of the clock afternoon, in the Session-house, and that they may be conversed with anent their willingness to accept, and qualifications for the said office."

"*2nd May, 1733.*—These formerly nominate to be Elders being advertised by the Kirk-officer to attend this day accordingly—compeared (names), and being judicially examined as to their qualifications and abilities for that office, they were approved; and appointed intimation to be made from the pulpit, Sabbath next, that if any person have any thing to object against them why they may not be ordained Elders of this congregation, they may appear before the Session on Thursday, 17th May instant, with certification, if no relevant objection be made they will go on in their ordination. Absentees appointed to speak with the minister and Elders on Saturday.

"*17th May, 1733.*—The edict of these formerly nominate to be Elders having been intimate according to appointment, was this day three several times called at the most patent door of the Kirk, and none appearing to object against their being Elders, the Session appoints their ordination by Master Ralph Erskine, Sabbath come eight days."—Sess. Rec. of Dunfermline, 1733.

Other cases could be quoted, showing that in very many instances, at least the election of Elders, continued to be popular. The Rev. John Currie of Kinglassie, the able defender of the church, against the early Seceders, in the first part of the last century, speaking of himself, in 1740, in his 'Vindication of the Real Principles of the Reformation,' (p. 293,) states, that it was his principle that the congregation had the right of electing Elders as well as Pastors. At the same time, he thought that the existing Elders should turn their attention to such in the congregation as they judged most meet for the office, that they might be proposed to the congregation, who might add or alter, as they saw proper. He then describes his practice shortly before, in connection with the appointment of Elders in his parish. It appears that, after mature deliberation, when the Session

had given in their verdict, “and some private persons in the congregation had also been consulted, the Kirk Session judged it proper, that such of them as they thought meet and would be willing to accept of the office, might be proposed to the congregation, that they might add or alter as they thought meet, which was accordingly done. At which time he told the congregation that they had this liberty, desiring them to come to the Session on such a day, or, if any of them had any thing to except against the persons proposed, or any thing to propose anent others whom they preferred, if they were not inclined to come to the Session, they might tell their mind to him or any of the Elders privately, and what they had to except against any of these named by the Session, or to propose anent any others, it should be considered.”

But while the popular election of Elders is agreeable to the constitution of the Church of Scotland, it is believed that it never was—as indeed it never should be so absolute as to exclude the concurrence of the existing Session. No: It is plainly reasonable and right, that in the event of an ignorant and manifestly improper election by the communicants, the existing Session should have a veto. Of course, this is a power which, in the great majority of cases, would not be exercised. Sessions would naturally be sparing in their interference with the choice of the people over whom they presided—in spiritual things of this nature. But it is proper that there should be a power in such matters. It seems agreeable to analogy that Sessions should stand in the same relation to Elders that Presbyteries do to candidates for the ministry; and, as presbyteries pronounce judgment on the character and qualifications of a probationer who has been elected by the people—so that Kirk Sessions should pronounce upon the same qualities in those elected Elders by the people. Besides, this power seems peculiarly requisite, until the members of congregations in towns become more generally and intimately acquainted with each other.

Ere long the brevity of an annual appointment was found inconvenient; but it was in use down to 1642, if not later. The election to the office was permanent,

only there were intermissions to the service. In these days the duties were so onerous—occupied so much time, and demanded such serious sacrifices, that it could not be expected that men, in the absence of a temporal provision, could continue in the active discharge of them for a lifetime. Hence, to use the language of Gillespie, “that ease of intermission and serving by courses which was allowed to the Levites of old in the temple.”

During the whole history of the Church of Scotland she has enjoyed the services of Ruling Elders. Even in the periods of violent Episcopal usurpation the office was maintained. Shorn of its power, and much impaired in the numbers who held it and also in its usefulness, it still existed. Previously to 1638, at least in some cases, Elders appear to have been deprived of the power of sitting and voting in superior church courts. Currie of Kinglassie, in his ‘Vindication,’ states, that for eight years previous to 1638, no Ruling Elder sat in the Presbytery of Kircaldy. And it is certain that both the Commissioner and Moderator, in the celebrated General Assembly of that year, speak of the office of Ruling Elder as one which had been intermitted, and was only then reviving. But these were the days when, by royal authority and intrigue, moderators in Presbyteries were made perpetual—when bishops sat in Parliament, and they and archbishops were ever intermeddling in the most arbitrary manner with the settlement of ministers. In the dark persecuting days of Charles II, there were Kirk Sessions, or the shadow and skeleton of them. So essential a part was the Eldership of the Presbyterian church accounted, and so deeply was it engrained in the affections of the Scottish people, that though inconsistent with the genius of Episcopacy, persecuting prelates were not able utterly to destroy it. The moment that the pressure of persecution was removed, and any tolerable measure of freedom restored, and religion revived, that moment did the Eldership regain its character, numbers, and strength.

It appears, from an interesting session record, that

in 1657, even after decline had begun to infect the Presbyterian church, the city of Glasgow was divided into five quarters, to each of which 18 Elders and 18 Deacons were attached—making in all 90 Elders and as many Deacons in a town, according to modern estimate, by no means considerable. The porportion seems to have been 18 Elders to about 2000 persons, or one Elder to little more than 100 persons. How different is this state of things from the most favourable provision in the same city at the present day—a city where few Elders probably have a smaller number than 500 souls under their care!

Through the intelligence and kindness of William Peebles, Esq. of Dunfermline, an enlightened and devoted friend of the Church of Scotland, I have been favoured with a number of extracts on the subject of the Eldership from the Session Records of that important parish—a parish which relatively was more important in the seventeenth century than at present. Perhaps as full extracts on the same subject have not been collected before. I content myself with a few references. In 1640, the records show a division of the town into six quarters, with the names of twenty-two elders, who were apportioned among families, and the country part of the parish divided into ten quarters among thirty-two elders, besides two for the Abbey, making in all fifty-six elders in a parish, where the population was so moderate that there was but one church. There seems to have been an elder for every hundred persons or twenty-five families. And, as usual, the elders were the leading men of the district. Among the names we find those of Lord Dunfermline, Sir Henry Wardlaw of Pitreavie, William Monteith of Randifurd, Sir James Halket of Pitfirrane, Robert Ged of Baldrig, William Wardlaw of Balmull, Henry Stewart of Beath, the laird of Pittenerie, all landed proprietors—the natural aristocracy of the parish. It is remarkable that in the Episcopal times of Charles II, though there are repeated elections of elders, there are no “gentlemen” among them, a plain proof that the Presbyterians were not low fanatics, but had the real gentry on their side. Two years later (1642) we find the parish mapped out among

forty-seven elders, and in 1655 the distinction between the offices of elder and deacon, having according to the appointment of Session been better defined, we read of twenty-three elders and sixteen deacons.

The Session constituting a court where character was necessarily a subject of discussion, its proceedings with all propriety were considered confidential. In October 1648 "It is ordained that if any of the elders or deacons shall hereafter divulge or reveal any thing spoken or done in Session, that they shall be deposed from their places." Regular attendance at meetings of Session was strictly required. "April, 1647.—It is thought fit that the elders who shall hereafter absent themselves from the Session twice—not having a lawful excuse, shall be censured, and the third time to pay as the Session shall modify."

Both elders and deacons were expected to visit their proportions monthly, and when these were so small and the parties so well known to each other—all members of the same church—this, comparatively speaking, was of easy attainment. In 1646, it is ordained, that all the elders of the parish shall visit the sick—each of them in their own quarters, and give up the names to the minister—that monthly they shall give in to the Session a roll of persons under church censure—and of strangers "and incomers." It is likewise ordained that the deacons shall try and visit the poor within their quarters, and give in a monthly roll of them, and it is also resolved to revive the old practice of visiting the public houses during the time of divine service on the Lord's day, to see that none are profaning the day with intemperance, when they ought to be engaged in religious worship. Vagabond entrants and servants without testimonials of character are not to be allowed to remain within the parish. Church discipline was strict and comprehensive. Not only were breaches of the Seventh Commandment taken up, but offences against the Fourth and the other Commandments. Grinding corn on the Sabbath day was for the first transgression a fine of forty shillings, and for the second four pounds Scots. And quarreling and scolding were severely punished. In some cases im-

prisonment was not considered too heavy a punishment for such sins.

The kirk-session of Dunfermline in February 1649 received the following overtures from the Presbytery.

OVERTURES FOR ORDERING OF KIRK-SESSIONS.

"The Presbytery learning frequently from the brethren of every parish, that still profaneness abounded, and that they find very small progress of the power of godliness in the places of their charge, they conceive this—much to flow from the neglect and slackness of elders, not seeing to the manners of people, nor delating scandalous livers according to their place—therefore do appoint that there be a new election of elders and deacons in every congregation of their bounds, whose proper and distinct charge may be learned out of the Books of Discipline, and that they be, 1st. Men of good report both for knowledge and conversation, free of scandalous walking, such as are known to govern their families well and to have all religious exercises in their families, as likewise attenders upon the public worship at all occasions.

2nd. It is thought expedient that in the most numerous congregations there be about eighteen elders and twelve deacons. In the less numerous there be about ten elders and eight deacons, and in the least there be about six elders and four deacons.

3rd. That magistrates in parishes, having the foresaid qualifications, be chosen elders.

4th. The said elders and deacons to meet together in session with the minister once every week, absentees to be marked and censured, and who shall be found absent without a sufficient reason approved of by the kirk—to be admonished—if continue to be absent, to be called before the Session to be censured, and if he refuse to submit, then to be cited before the public to be censured there.

5th. That they have their several wards and bounds, over which in a special manner they watch, and that every first Session-day in the month, the minister en-

quire concerning the behaviour of those under their charge, which is not to exempt them from duty towards the rest of the people as they shall have occasion.

6th. That when it is found any connive at faults, neglect to delate them, or speak in Sessions for offenders, that they be censured for the first fault with rebuke; if fail again in any of those, then to be put a while from the exercise of their office, and if continue to be deposed.

7th. That the elders visit the families of their bounds four times a year, to know of their Christian teaching, and what obedience they give to the acts of the kirk, and to report accordingly; and the Session call for an account of their diligence herein on the first Session day of the month of February, of the month of May, of August, and of November, and that they be reminded of this duty every quarter of the year timeously.

8th. That when there is any sick persons within their charge they visit them and give also advertisement to the minister of any sick persons.

9th. That no sooner any stranger, that is, any from another parish, shall come into their bounds to reside but that they give notice thereof to the session at their first meeting, that they may have his testimonials or else that he be removed out of their bounds.

10th. That elders join with the minister in the visitation of their several quarters, and that they come with the people of their division to catechising and examination.

11th. That elders and deacons failing in the foresaid duties be censured by the Session, and if they continue in their faults, to be cited before the Presbytery to be censured there.

Which orders, being read in session, were received and approved, and appointed to be read publicly out of the pulpit."

The preceding "Overtures for the ordering of Kirk Sessions," show the spirit of the elders of the middle of the 17th century. Surely neither these nor any thing which has yet been related, indicate that the office-bearers of the church in that day were those ignorant, foolish, weak-minded, preposterous fanatics which so many in our day delight to represent them to have been.

With regard to examination previous to admission

to the Lord's table, the following rules were adopted in March, 1656 :

“ 27th March, 1656 —The minister and elders going about the examination of the people for the communion—1st. Resolved, that those persons who neglect the keeping of the diets of examination, whether masters or others, if twice absent, to be admonished by the minister and elders, and if the third time, to be cited to the session, or suspended from the communion. without respect of persons, and these to be marked by the ministers and elders.

“ 2nd. That the ministers, with the elders, shall try the knowledge of every one that comes, according to the act of Assembly, 1648, August 10, Sess. 38.

“ 3rd. After persons are observed to be ignorant, or absentees from catechising by the ministers and elders, the elders in their several quarters may deal with these by visiting their families, and exhorting their masters and themselves yet to learn.

“ 4th. For their measure of knowledge, that the ministers shall agree upon some common questions, to be proposed to every one whose knowledge they doubt of, and that they insist most upon those questions which are preparations for the sacrament.

“ 5th. Concerning scandalous persons, such as ordinary tiplers and swearers, scolders, and who live at variance with their neighbours, ordinary absenter from catechising, ordinary neglectors of the worship of God in their families, &c., that some way be taken for trying them, and keeping them back from the communion, if they continue in it—conform to the directions of the General Assembly.

“ 6th. That at least there be two elders with the minister at examination.

“ 7th. That if any elder or deacon appointed to wait on be absent, and do not wait on either himself, or some other with whom he may agree, he shall be suspended from his place for a time, except he have a very reasonable excuse.

“ 8th. That with the elders of the quarter, the session appoint any other elder or deacon to wait on at examination.”

It may render the picture more complete and satisfactory if, in addition to the information supplied by the sessional records of a large parish, embracing a considerable town, we appeal to that furnished by the records of a neighbouring country parish. Through the kindness of the same friend who assisted me in regard to Dunfermline, aided by the parochial schoolmaster, I am able to refer to the sessional records of the parish of Torryburn—a parish with which I am well acquainted, from having had the happiness of being its minister for several years.

The parish seems to have been more populous at the period of which I write than at the present day. There were two parishes joined in one (Torrie and Crombie,) and a considerable manufacture of salt. Probably the population might be estimated at from 1700 to 1800; the records stretch as far back as 1629. Even at this period, when the church was suffering under semi-Episcopacy, there were fourteen elders in the parish, and a strict discipline exercised. Sabbath profanation by brewers, salt-makers, and others, was carefully prohibited; penny bridals, or weddings, which were connected with great abuses, restrained; testimonials of character were required from every entrant into the parish, and absentees from the usual catechetical examinations were subjected to admonition and fine; elders were expected, as in Dunfermline, to visit the families under their care monthly. As an indication of the importance of the duties which were discharged by kirk sessions, even in days when Episcopacy had made in many quarters a serious invasion on the constitution of the Presbyterian church, it may be mentioned that it appears from the record there were nineteen sessional meetings in 1630—

19 in 1631,	19 in 1635,
The next two years are not marked.	6 „ 1636,
20 in 1634,	7 „ 1637.

In the two latter years, with the growing distaste for Episcopacy, there was a considerable diminution of sessional meetings, but with the rise of presbytery there is an increase:

In 1638 there were 12 meetings.	In 1647 there were 23 meetings.
" 1639 " " 12 "	" 1648 " " 31 "
" 1640 " " 36 "	" 1649 " " 48 "
" 1641 " " 40 "	" 1650 " " 46 "
" 1612 " " 38 "	" 1651 " " 36 "
Three years are not given.	" 1652 " " 40 "
" 1646 " " 18 "	" 1653 " " 47 "

In the Presbyterian period, from being held once a month, sessions came to be held almost once a-week. This shows that they were in most active operation, and that a very important part of the business of parishes was conducted by them. The precise number of elders is not given; but in 1647 twelve are appointed to see that the Sabbath be properly observed in three parts of the parish, and two years after there is an election held of elders and deacons for eleven districts. There seems to have been nineteen elders, or more than one for every 100 persons.

I shall not attempt to enumerate all the DUTIES OF THE ELDERSHIP AS THEN EXERCISED; in addition to those already stated, there was an earnest care to promote family worship among the people. In July, 1640, the session "ordains that elders do see that all persons in their several districts keep up family worship, read the word, and catechise." Two years later, "it is agreed that the minister and elder of the district shall go through each district, try every family what care they have of family worship, and press it with all earnestness." In February, 1648, it is stated that "the elders of the quarters received 100 books, intended to supply directions in family worship; they were to be distributed among the families within their respective quarters, the elders being ordained to bring in two shillings for each book." The money, amounting to £10, was afterwards paid.

While duties more peculiarly belonging to the family were attended to, those of education *at school* were not neglected. In May, 1642, it is agreed that the minister and elder shall go through the different districts of the parish, "and bring in the account of the names and number of children, both male and female, between seven and ten years, that they may be put to school." Next month the session ordains "elders to deal with

parents having children in their districts, that they put them to school ; and in case they do it not, to pay twenty shillings to the box, and make public repentance for their perjury in breaking the oath made at the baptism of their children, and if any are poor, and unable to pay, the session agree to pay the fees." These earnest desires in behalf of education were most honourable, and were carried into practical effect. In March, 1649, "the schoolmasters being enquired at, if 'the bairns' did attend the school, they declared that many parents did withdraw their children ; and the names of those parents were given in to the session, who were ordered to be summoned against next day of meeting. Compeared the said parents, and promised to send their children back to school without fail next week."

The religious instruction of the grown-up and the aged, through the medium of *the church*, was provided for as well as the education of youth, through the medium of the school. The kirk-sessions of the middle of the 17th century were zealous Church Extensionists. In June, 1647, "the elders made heavy regret that the kirk was too little to contain the people of the parish—that hundreds were constrained to sit in the kirk-yard in time of sermon, about the doors and windows, and that many staid at home; therefore they unanimously resolved to deal with the heritors to build an aisle on the north side of the kirk to contain two hundred people, and agreed to be stented (assessed) to that effect ; conform to their means and substance."

The exertions employed by the kirk-session to bring up the people by suitable teaching for partaking aright of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper were most laborious and praiseworthy. If communicants were not well qualified, it was no fault of their recognised instructors. In January, 1641, "the session ordains the communion to be held conformably to the acts of Assembly, at two several seasons of the year ; viz., in the months of July and October. Ordains examinations for the first diet (July) to begin on every Tuesday and Thursday of the month of January ; and the session to convene every evening thereafter, and examine on the Sabbath afternoons in the months of March

and April and May, so that there be nothing but to celebrate the communion"—(that is, that all be in such a state of preparation that when the time comes round there be no hesitation or delay). " Likewise for the diet of October, ordains examination in the months of June and July, and in the Sabbath after sermon in the months of August and September, so that there be nothing but to celebrate the communion in October." Elders are to attend the diet of examination of their quarters, and absentees from two examinations are to be fined six shillings Scots. Seventeen pounds are raised by the people to defray the expences of the second communion.

While kirk-sessions were thus so zealous in instructing the people, and raising their religious character to a high pitch in point of knowledge, they did not fail—and that successfully—to exercise their beneficent affections. One may fear that so severe a discipline would render men unfeeling and unamiable. But it is not so. The records are marked with many pleasing traces of kindness to the poor, particularly the suffering saints of God. So early as Nov. 1631, we read of thirty pounds Scots being collected under the care of the session for "distressed Germans." Next year they collect for "the poor captives of Dysart and Kircaldy" detained in Turkish slavery. In 1642, not less than ninety pounds Scots are contributed in behalf of the poor Irish Protestants. The succeeding year other thirty pounds are added to the sum; and, at the same time, forty merks are set apart for the "captives of Inverkeithing, and other parishes." In July, 1647, two hundred merks are sent to "the distressed people of Argyle;" and, three years after, forty pounds are sent for the relief of Scottish soldiers detained as prisoners. The kirk-sessions then, with all their stern discipline, were not insensible to the claims of Christian philanthropy.

Like good men, however, living in trying times, they were occasionally depressed in the discharge of their arduous duties. The following extract—the last which we shall give—will show how they and their people were sustained in such circumstances. Under date July, 1650, it is recorded—"The elders reported that the

schools were all getting loose—that many strangers had come into the parish—and that people were much disheartened from doing their duty either to God or themselves, by reason of the sad state of affairs, &c., and of soldiers disturbing the country. The minister recommends to the elders to enjoin upon the people a patient waiting for better times, and in the meantime to endeavour the doing of all duty to God, and themselves, and their neighbours."

Similar quotations might be made from the records of other kirk-sessions, both of town and rural parishes. Indeed, what has been adduced may be considered as descriptive of the spirit and discipline of the kirk-sessions of Scotland generally, if not universally; and surely they are most creditable to the intellectual, moral, and religious character of the eldership—yea, of the people as a whole, and yet the election was popular!

I am aware that it is common with many, in indiscriminate terms, to condemn the strictly Presbyterian periods of Scottish history for the severity of discipline which was exercised, especially in connection with witchcraft; and I am far from approving or vindicating that discipline as a whole. It was unduly stern; and, in reference to witchcraft, it was altogether indefensible—founded on popular delusion; but in judging of the discipline of these days, it is no more than candid to bear in mind, that the state of society was very rough, and men felt public exposure less—that the civil and criminal laws were weak, and that the ecclesiastical was frequently the only one which could be enforced—that public opinion, in the sense in which we understand the term, was then almost unknown, and hence the actual infliction of church courts needed to be the more severe. It is also to be remembered that the harshest discipline of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland was far surpassed by that of the Primitive church, which could not plead the same apologies.¹

¹ As this sheet is passing through the press, I have met (London Missionary Register for March, 1841, p. 155,) with a curious illustration of the discipline of the Scottish Church of the 17th century, in a quarter where one would not naturally have looked for it. A missionary of the Church of England at Tallygunge—

With regard to the particular offence of witchcraft, which appears so frequently in the church records, it is to be considered that this was the delusion, not of a few years—not of the age—not of Scotland—but of Europe; that there was as much witchcraft, as well as other unnatural crimes, in the Episcopalian as in the Presbyterian periods, and that in both it was treated much alike; that in those cases, where there was any difference, this was not owing to milder or more enlightened general views of the subject, but to the circumstance that there was not the same faithful discharge of duty in detecting and exposing crimes under Episcopal as under Presbyterian rule,¹ and that the delusion generally was breaking up when the former rule was in force under Charles II.

After the Revolution of 1688, there was, as might have been expected, a great revival in the Eldership. The persecution of 30 years was closed, and though it left the church weak, she was zealously alive to her duties. Accordingly most of the acts of Assembly bearing on the qualifications of Elders, and warmly calling them to the discharge of duty, are to be found in this period: such as the Acts 1694, 1697, 1699, 1704, 1706, 1722. We may extract two of them.

The Assembly, 1697, “considering *how necessary a duty it is* that the worship of God and calling upon his a missionary station, I believe, not many miles from Calcutta, with about 100 communicants, writes the other day—“It is our custom, (as was that of the primitive church,) in case of notorious and flagrant crimes, to suspend from communion, and to make the delinquents stand *in a conspicuous place during the whole of the service*, partly to put them to open shame and partly to deter others from the contagion.” Our Episcopalian friends are generally most severe in their censure of the old public discipline of the Church of Scotland. Here is a congregation of their own, under the immediate eye of the devoted bishop of Calcutta, belonging not to the evangelical, and therefore alleged enthusiastic ‘Church Missionary Society,’ but to the old high church ‘Gospel Propagation Society,’ acting upon the same principles, pleading the authority of the primitive church in their behalf, and so far as appears unchallenged by their superiors for the practice. Such a case as this should teach a little toleration for the Scottish Presbyterians of the 17th century.

¹ Vide Lamont’s Diary, 1649, 1671,—also Appendix, for some important facts.

name, be *daily performed in all families*, do recommend it to Ministers and Elders in each congregation to *take care thereof*; and, *it being the duty of all Ruling Elders and Deacons to be exemplary herein*, the Assembly *renews and confirms the Act of Assembly 1694*, recommending *that none be Ruling Elders who make not conscience of this unquestionable duty*; and *do likewise appoint, that in case any Elders or Deacons shall neglect to worship God in their families*, by themselves or others appointed for that effect, that they be seriously admonished to amend, and if need be, rebuked for the same; and if, notwithstanding, they shall yet continue obstinate in their neglect, *that such Elder or Deacon shall be removed from his office by the Presbytery.*"

The Assembly, 1722,—“*being deeply affected with the great decay of Christian piety amongst all ranks, and the abounding of vice and immorality; and considering that slackness and partiality in the exercise of discipline, and untenderness in the walk and conversation of the office-bearers in the Church, cannot but greatly contributeto the increase of these evils;* therefore, the General Assembly do earnestly *beseech, exhort, and require*, all Ministers to take heed to themselves and to their doctrine, *and to be exemplary to their people*. And, in like manner, the Assembly do earnestly *beseech, exhort, and require*, Elders and Deacons to be faithful in the discharge of their respective offices, tender and circumspect in their walk, *and punctual in their attendance upon ordinances, strict in the observance of the Lord's day, and in regularly keeping up the worship of God in their families*. And the General Assembly appoints the judicatories of the Church to *take good heed that none be admitted to, or continued in, these offices but such as are found qualified, and do behave themselves as above required*. And appoints Kirk Sessions, Presbyteries, and Synods, *strictly and impartially, without respect of persons, to observe this and former Acts of Assembly, relative to office-bearers in the Church.*”—Act 9th.

The elders at this and even a still later day were very numerous. The Rev. Mr. Lewis, in his excellent pam-

phlet, mentions a small parish in Fifeshire—probably of not more than nine hundred souls, which in 1704 had not less than twenty-four elders. This was an elder for every forty persons—indicating a complete and easy spiritual oversight of families. A similar small rural parish—now without an elder, had then not less than thirty of these most useful ecclesiastical office-bearers.

It is not needful to say anything of the GREAT MORAL AND RELIGIOUS RESULTS, wrought out for the country by the church, of which Elders formed so important a part. I have already adverted to some of them, and they are well known. It may be safely said that there is no parallel to these results in the history of the world. The sacrifices which were made by the Church, when struggling for her very existence—fettered and oppressed in a thousand ways—were most generous and unwearied. In promoting the cause of education, in labouring for the poor—in overcoming Popery, and then sweeping away its last remains—in maintaining the sacred observance of the Sabbath—contributing for distressed Christians both at home and abroad—cultivating among her ministers literature and learning—in short in civilising and christianising Scotland she stands almost alone among Christian churches. Her patriotic, self-denied, and successful struggles for civil and religious freedom—struggles in the benefit of which England and even Europe shared, will never be forgotten, and we trust will be more and more appreciated. But it is plain, that had it not been for her eldership, she could not have rendered the services to patriotism, learning, morality, and religion, which she was honoured to yield. Deprived of so large a body of the most pious and influential of the land, she would have been comparatively helpless—as helpless as other churches which do not enjoy the same advantages. Independently of the high testimony which was borne to the character, and worth, and influence of the Ruling Elders, within the memorable Assembly of 1638—an Assembly which may be said to have revolutionized Scotland—when a leading clerical member attributed the harmony and success of the proceedings in a great measure to the perseverance of her elders—in addition

to this, we have the remarkable fact, that two several times in the history of Scotland, parliament, when legislating regarding the settlement of ministers, vested a large share of the power in the Eldership. This is a plain proof of the importance of that body of men in the country at these periods. No legislator at the present day would think of vesting equal power in the Eldership as now constituted. Indeed there seems little doubt that the defective state of kirk-sessions generally, (though happily and rapidly improving) is one of the serious bars to the satisfactory settlement of the church's present difficulties. Many who would be glad to see an abrogation of the law of lay patronage, are at a loss where to vest the right of nomination, so as to be at once popular and safe. This indirectly testifies to the prominence and general weight of the Eldership at an earlier day.

With the decline of religion throughout Protestant Christendom, from the middle of the last century downwards, there was a very unfavourable change in the numbers and character of the eldership of the Church of Scotland. In many cases true religion sunk so low, that men of suitable station as well as piety, to be called to the eldership, could not be found. Hence in such parishes there were and are no elders, or merely nominal Elders. The working of the law of lay patronage also proved most disastrous to kirk-sessions—breaking them up—driving faithful elders into dissent—and preventing good men from joining a session, even where elected, in the dread of an unacceptable appointment to the pulpit, by the death or removal of the present pastor putting them under an obnoxious minister. The new mode of appointment to the office was doubtless most injurious. In the great majority of cases a small shrivelled session, under the influence of one or two individuals—named the new elders, who unless decidedly objected to by the congregation, (an unpleasant and rarely exercised right,) were forthwith ordained—sometimes not even in public. In not a few instances, men were nominated to the office, not to discharge its ordinary duties, but to be eligible to a seat in the General Assembly. These causes tended to lower the office

in public estimation, and to prevent many men of the best qualification from becoming elders. Though willing to join a session when called by the congregation, and satisfied that the people wished their services, they could not be prevailed upon to accept the office upon any other terms. The result of the whole is, that though there has been a great and happy change of late years—a change which continues in rapid progress—still a large number of parishes at the present moment have no elders, and have had none for years, and many more are most imperfectly provided—while not a few, where the complement is not deficient in point of mere numbers, lag far behind the spirit of the elders of the olden time. It is estimated that upon an average there are not more than three or four elders to every parish in Scotland—a serious change from the day when there were from twenty to thirty elders in the smallest rural parishes. One proof of the decay in the eldership is to be found in the fact that there is scarcely a book upon the office; but, as we have already said, there is a great and growing change for the better. Kirk sessions are increasing in numbers, and improving in religious spirit; and one of the most important ways of hastening on the blessed change is by a more popular election to the office. The advantages of such a course are ably expounded by Mr. Dunlop, in the Presbyterian Review for January, 1835, on the ground that this is a matter where there can be no question as to the power of the Church to follow what she judges best; that there is no temptation to a keen canvass, there being no worldly interest at stake, as in the case of the minister; and that congregations can, for the most part, thoroughly ascertain the character and qualifications of those whom they elect; besides, the many evils of a more close system are avoided. It may be added, as an interesting circumstance, that the General Assembly has already checked the unhappy practice of ordaining non-acting elders, merely for the purpose of being returned as members of the General Assembly, and that she is in the course of important discussions to renovate and improve the character of the eldership yet more. There can be little question that had the eldership of the Church

of Scotland been always numerous, faithful, and good, this part of the Presbyterian constitution must have gone far to prevent or correct the decline of the ministry, and other component parts of the National Church. A good eldership in a congregation is not only a check upon indolence and false doctrine in the minister, but where heresy appears in the pulpit, elders form a large and influential body to which the church may look with confidence for support in the exercise of discipline on the pastor,—a body, in the absence of whom there might be no small danger of the congregation being deceived by sophistry, or misled by sympathy for the erroneous teacher. The revival, then, of the eldership must be contemplated by every friend of true religion with the liveliest interest, not only for its own sake, but for its bearing upon other parts of the Presbyterian church.

CHAPTER VII.

PROCEEDINGS IN ST. DAVID'S CONGREGATION IN THE POPULAR APPOINTMENT OF ELDERS.

IT may now be proper to give some account of a recent popular election of Elders in the congregation of which I have the honour to be minister. The Rev. Mr. Lewis records one or two interesting cases in his pamphlet; and the multiplication of such instances, it is believed, is more fitted than any thing else to disarm prejudices and fears, and to recommend the practice to universal adoption. The earnest struggle, too, in which the Church is at present engaged to secure for her people a legitimate influence in the appointment of ministers will naturally and in consistency lead ministers and kirk-sessions to grant to the members of the congregation a more decided influence than hitherto in the appointment of elders.

The existing Session of St. David's having agreed that it was desirable to add to their numbers, reduced by death and growing infirmities, and having also resolved that the most consistent and best plan to follow was to call upon the male communicants to elect, subject, of course, in the event of any decidedly ignorant or improper choice, to the veto of the Session, authorised the minister to inform the congregation of this resolution. In pursuance of it the following circular was placed in all the pews of the church.

“Intimation to St. David’s Congregation.

“The Kirk Session of St. David’s parish, having resolved that it is proper to add to their present number, have unanimously agreed to request, and hereby do request the male communicants of the congregation to nominate eight persons to the office of the eldership. The Kirk Session are persuaded that in so important a step the electors will feel their responsibility—will ex-

ercise all due caution—will confer among themselves, and ask guidance of God in prayer, that they may be directed to such men as may have time to devote, and qualifications to fit them for promoting the moral and religious good of the parish and congregation—such as aiding the minister in visiting the sick, and superintending the education of the young, &c.

“It is proposed that the electors put down the names of the whole number desired, or of as many as they judge best qualified for the office, agreeably to the annexed form, and having done so, they are requested to sign their own name at the bottom, and fold, seal, and return the note to Mr. Lorimer, or any of the elders, on or before Monday the 11th January, 1841, that the Session may scrutinise the lists, and take steps for the ordination of those who are elected by the congregation.”

(Here follow the names of those who are judged suitable persons to be added to the eldership, to which is appended the name of the communicant nominating them to the office.)

Contemporaneously with this notice, which gave the congregation a month for deliberation and conference and prayer, I preached several successive discourses on the divine authority, qualifications, &c., of the office of Ruling Elder, the substance of which is published in this little work. Several meetings of the male communicants were held for prayer and conference. At these meetings there was first an easy conversation on the qualifications and duties of the Eldership, and then the suggestion of a number of names by communicants present, of persons whom they deemed suitable for the office. There was no discussion on character—not a few indeed who were named being actually present. One chief design of these week-day meetings was to give an opportunity to communicants to meet with and become acquainted with each other; and names having been suggested, those who from their own personal knowledge were unable to make up their list had an opportunity of ascertaining the qualification of those who were named by others, from private enquiry and conference, and so of completing their lists. The

meetings were pretty well attended, and the spirit was excellent. The great object of all was evidently to get the best qualified men. There was an anxiety also to meet the wishes of the Session, and that the result of the election should be so satisfactory as to encourage other congregations to adopt a popular mode of appointment. The grand difficulty which those present and the congregation generally felt, was the want of acquaintance with each other. Indeed this is the only practical difficulty. It is a serious one, however, in large towns, and I believe restrained the Session from earlier making trial of the same mode of election. The means resorted to had the effect in some measure of overcoming it; and at all events it was seen that if ever a more constitutional mode of election was to be introduced, the difficulty would have to be encountered sometime, and that it would never lessen by letting it alone.

The election took place at the appointed time—the lists were given in—and though, from the cause above described, many communicants gave in no list—afraid to do harm in so solemn a trust—yet there was a respectable number of lists, sufficient plainly to intimate the wishes of the congregation. Eight gentlemen were named it appeared on scrutinising the lists; and the far larger part of them almost unanimously. Two declined to accept, for satisfactory reasons. The others were shortly after ordained in the face of the congregation, and received the right hand of fellowship from their brother elders. I am sure that I express the general feeling of the previous Session and of the congregation, when I state that the result has been most satisfactory—that those appointed are excellent men. Several of them have been actively engaged in Sabbath school teaching, and the regular visitation of the sick, long previously to their election as elders. Various excellent names were also suggested, though not by a sufficient number of votes to secure their election. Indeed, I may say that not a person was nominated in the lists, who would not have been a credit to any session. The small number of declinatures is also an interesting circumstance, contrasting as it does with the number which were received, when on a former occasion asked

in the old way by the minister and session to become elders. It may be added, that had it not been for the call of the congregation, several, it is believed, of those now elected, would have declined. The voice of Providence given forth after conference and united prayer was one of the circumstances which weighed powerfully with them in determining their acceptance. In short, with all their diffidence they did not feel themselves warranted to refuse what the great Head of the Church by his providence had so plainly imposed upon them.

For the sake of communicants in general, and those brethren who may not have a copy of the questions appointed to be put to elders at their ordination, I subjoin them :—

“ Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament to be the word of God, and the only rule of faith and manners? Do you sincerely own and believe the whole doctrine of the Confession of Faith, approven by the General Assembly of this National Church, and ratified by law in the year 1690, to be the truths of God; and do you own the whole doctrine therein contained as the confession of your faith? Do you sincerely own the purity of worship authorised and practised in this Church, and are you persuaded that the Presbyterian government and discipline now so happily established therein, are founded upon the word of God and agreeable thereto? Do you promise that, in your practice, you will conform yourselves to the said worship—that you will submit yourselves to the said discipline and government—that you will never endeavour, directly or indirectly, the prejudice or subversion of the same—and that you will follow no divisive courses from the present establishment in the church? Do you accept of the office of an Elder of this parish, and promise, through grace, faithfully, diligently, and cheerfully to discharge the duties thereof.”

CHAPTER VIII.

CHARGE TO NEWLY ORDAINED ELDERS.

CHRISTIAN FRIENDS.—You have been honourably called to the office of Ruling Elders in the church of Christ, by the electing voice of the congregation, and with the full concurrence of the kirk session. Your appointment has not been made without deliberation and prayer; and now what shall I say? The office is unconnected with any worldly gain, but it is most honourable and responsible—inferior in these respects only to the office of the Holy Ministry. Your ecclesiastical station is truly important, your sphere of usefulness greatly enlarged, and your means and opportunities of doing good vastly multiplied.

A particular district of the parish will be assigned to each, and I trust you will make it your care, so far as lies in your power, to know the state of morality and religion within its bounds, and to use all scriptural means to promote the best interests of the people. A part of the congregation will also be allotted to each, and it will be expected that you take notice of the attendance of the different families on divine worship, and of the manner in which they support their religious profession in common life; that you will prudently warn, admonish, and reprove, counsel, encourage, and strengthen as you see needful; that you will attend to the situation of the poor, though the employment be often a thankless one, and exposed to many disappointments; that you will call upon the sick and bereaved in their afflictions, commanding them by prayer to the sympathy and care of the Shepherd of Israel; that you will take an interest in Sabbath schools, and the cause of week-day education generally, and also in prayer and missionary meetings; that you will likewise anxiously guard the sanctity of the Lord's day from profanation, whether public or

private, and, in short, encourage all means fitted to further the moral and religious welfare of the congregation and parish with which you are connected. It is expected, too, that you will follow the things which make for peace, endeavour to compose differences, and to provoke to love and to good works. Attention to these duties is necessary, not only for the sake of the pastor, that he may know the state of the people, and so be better able to accommodate his ministrations, public and private, to their particular circumstances, but also that the elders may act with judgment, caution, and tenderness, in those cases where they are called to grant or to withhold church privileges.

While I remind you in a general way of these various and comprehensive duties, I desire specially to press upon you the remembrance that your office directly concerns the souls of men, and that the eternal bliss or woe of many may depend upon its faithful or unfaithful exercise. The true nature of the office may often have been lost sight of amid mere secularities, but it involves the oversight of immortal souls. Keep this ever in view—watch, and labour, and pray for the conversion of the unconverted in all their aspects and relations. It is they who have the strongest claims upon your sympathy and compassion; it is when thus employed that you most resemble Christ, and best fulfil one of the great ends of the eldership. Remember the young; remind them of their baptismal dedication, and avail yourselves of all means and opportunities, direct and indirect, of bringing them to the Saviour, of interesting them in the great salvation, and guarding them against the temptations and snares of the world. With this view, encourage to the uttermost scriptural schools, and admonish parents of their duties to their children, of the obligations of family worship, and a consistent example. Have a tender regard for the sick and dying, and those who are bereaved of such as are near and dear to them. Pray not only with them when called for, but remember them in your private devotions, especially when they ask for your intercessions. Embrace the opportunities which afflictive providences supply for teaching spiritual lessons, and let it be practically

known, that in you all the poor and distressed of the district have ever a ready, sympathising, and Christian friend.

It is not to be disguised that, as public men, you may expect occasionally to share in misrepresentation and reproach—perhaps abuse. Detraction is a cowardly sin, but a common one, and is always directed most against those who are in any way prominent in station or influence, or who are more active in doing good than their neighbours. It is easily practised, and such is the corruption of human nature, that the unfavourable views which it presents are too generally acceptable, and hence are often encouraged. But so far from being disheartened by this, it is no small evidence of our Christian faithfulness, that we do not please men of irreligious principles and irreligious practices—the worldly and profane. Let us be comforted in remembering that it is an honour to be reproached for righteousness' sake—that in this respect the servant is but as his Master, and that it is a small matter to be condemned by man's judgment, while we stand approved to that of conscience and of God.

Let me now shortly address a few exhortations to you as to the MANNER in which your duties as elders should be discharged; but first of all, let me counsel you often to think of the honour and responsibility which belong to the office. Many may and do think lightly of these, but they are most important; the office is not a device of man's; it is spiritual, founded on divine authority, directly concerned about the welfare of the Redeemer's church. To be a ruler in God's house is a situation at once of great honour and high trust, which will try the character of those who hold it. Sacramentally to be the custodiers of the body and the blood of Christ, to be keepers of the vineyard, to hold by discipline the keys of the kingdom of heaven, these are no light matters; they are honourable and onerous, demanding thought and care, and an anxious desire so to conduct oneself that we may be able to give in our account with joy. Magnify your office; be well persuaded of its divine authority and standing, and act in a corresponding spirit. This is the true way to raise it and make it honoured. So

long as men have poor views of the office, they will content themselves with humble and inadequate labours; and this will keep it low in public estimation. Entertaining just and scriptural views of the eldership, let me exhort you—

1st. To discharge the duties of your office with diligence. The exhortation of the apostle is, “Let him that ruleth rule with diligence,” implying that church rulers would be tempted to be indolent, careless, and negligent. We must remember that much of the life of an office depends upon its execution, and that the unprofitable servant was severely punished, not for abusing, but for not suitably improving his talent.

2nd. Discharge the duties of your new calling with humility. The possession of any power over others, whether civil or ecclesiastical, is apt to nourish pride. In the history of the Christian church there has been, on the part of the office-bearers, much of what the Scripture calls “lording over God’s heritage.” The Redeemer expressly cautions against this temper of mind, and exhorts office-bearers to be an example to the flock in humility and self-denial. Nothing more recommends their office to general acceptance.

3rd. Seek to discharge your duties in a gentle and peaceable spirit. Part of them consists in healing divisions, and this never can be accomplished by aught that savours of contention or impatience. Besides, admonitions and censures, to be effective, need to be conveyed with gentleness and long-suffering. There is no incongruity between strict discipline and a peaceable disposition, between truth and love. Men and churches may frequently have separated them, but they not only admit of union, where religion is enlightened and true, they are always inseparably joined together. Hence the exhortation of our Lord, “Have salt in yourselves”—that is, true doctrine, “and peace one with another.”

4th. Fulfil the duties of the office in a cheerful, liberal spirit. Ministers are exhorted to take the oversight of the flock, not by constraint, but willingly, and of a ready mind; and the same exhortation applies to Ruling Elders. Cheerfulness is pleasant to ourselves,

and to those with whom we are associated ; it makes many duties light which would otherwise be burdensome, and in various duties of the eldership it is peculiarly called for.

5th. Let me exhort you to be firm and resolved, valiant for the truth, and church, and cause of God. There are few things which more generally tempt office-bearers to decline from their principles, and the character which becomes them, than the fear of man,—it verily brings a snare. How did Abraham, under its influence, repeatedly use dissimulation ; and David flee to the Philistines for help ; and Peter basely deny his Master. Be, then, firm and courageous in what you believe to be the path of duty, and in maintaining the principles of the Church : make the Lord of Hosts your fear and your dread, and remember for your encouragement that Christ will be your shield.

6th. Be jealous of the honour of God, and of Christ, and of the Spirit, and of the Church. Beware of the character of Gallio, and of the Laodiceans ; rather remember and imitate the spirit of Josiah, whose praise was that his heart was tender—of David, whose eyes ran down with tears because men kept not God's law—of Jeremiah, who wished that his head were waters, and his eyes a fountain of tears, that he might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of his people.

7th. And lastly, Labour to fulfil the duties of your office with constancy and perseverance. You may meet with various difficulties and discouragements—yea, if faithful, you *shall* meet with many. But do not on this account intermit or desert the duty : you have, after deliberation and prayer, put your hand to the plough, do not look back regretting the step you have taken, as anxious for a release. Recollect that perseverance has its reward both here and hereafter, and however insufficient you may feel yourselves for the work—however untractable the materials with which you are occasionally called upon to deal—however small the degree of reformation often attained—however inadequate the countenance which you receive from those of whom better things might have been expected, still

do not weary or faint. Persevere—and He who has put it into your hearts to lay the foundation stone will one day enable you to bring forth the corner stone of completion with joy and shouting.

And in order to the successful discharge of your duties, whether public or private; in other words, to enable you better to comply with the exhortations which have been addressed to you, remember that the authority by which you act is divine, as really divine as that of the pastor or apostle—that the kingdom on whose government you have entered is the kingdom of Christ—that the Lord Jesus is Sovereign and Head of this kingdom—that he has promised to be with it and its office-bearers to the end of the world—and that, ere long, it shall destroy all opposing kingdoms, and like a great mountain, fill the whole earth. Remember that the strength by which you are called to discharge the duties of this office is not your own, but the strength of Christ—that he has promised ability—and that he is displeased with those who, like Moses, plead insufficiency for a work to which in his providence he has plainly called them. Remember what great things God has brought to pass by humble instruments—how Moses, the deliverer and lawgiver of the Jews, was a shepherd for a large part of his life—how the world was converted through immense regions to the faith of Christ by a few fishermen—and how, by the bare elements of water in Baptism, and bread and wine in the Lord's Supper, the grandest truths of revelation are set forth to view, and sealed to the everlasting good of the church of God. Remember, moreover, that the greatest undertakings have generally but small beginnings—that the reparation of the city and temple of Jerusalem seemed so contemptible as to provoke the mockery of beholders—that the best undertakings have always the greatest discouragements and opposition: Witness the protracted hostility which our blessed Lord encountered in his work. Remember too that God has all hearts in his hand—can raise up unexpected friends, and confound formidable enemies—that those who oppose the office of the elder, with its sacred and useful duties, are generally in their own

character and conduct an evidence of its necessity and excellence—that if those of whom better things might have been looked for do not countenance it, there is the greater reason why we should maintain its honour. And, moreover, let us remember that while it engages the approbation of God, it is a small matter that it is discountenanced by man. Remember, also, how much good God has been pleased already to work out in different ages of our Church, and of the Christian church generally, through the instrumentality of the office of the Ruling Elder; and that the past is a pledge and earnest of what He will do for the future. And, lastly, remember the recompence of reward which awaits you in the heavenly world. Here you are entitled to double honour, and to be held in high esteem for your works' sake; but though men be so unjust as to withhold this, you shall not miss your reward. A crown of glory is promised to the faithful Ruling, as well as Teaching Elder—a crown of glory which shall be given when the Chief Shepherd shall appear, and which shall never fade away. Indeed, there is no service rendered to Christ or to his church, however slender, but is registered in heaven. It may be forgotten by men—it is remembered by God. If so inconsiderable an act of kindness as simply reaching a cup of cold water to a thirsty disciple, out of regard to the will and gratitude for the love of the Saviour, shall not pass unrecompensed—surely a diligent, humble, conscientious, disinterested discharge of the duties of an elder in the Redeemer's church shall meet with no common acknowledgment in that great day when he who has turned a single soul from death shall shine as the stars of the firmament for ever and ever.

Seeing that the encouragements to the discharge of the office with which you are this day invested are so many and varied and strong, let me counsel you to be faithful; and as an important step to the success of all your undertakings and labours, let me exhort you to the increasing cultivation of personal religion—seek a greater acquaintance with divine truth, and to be brought more and more under its power in your life and conversation. Your office is especially intended to reprove

sin. Be yourselves free from sin. He who censures others needs himself to be clean. You are appointed by Christ to be examples to the flock. What would be little thought of in others will be considered a serious offence in you. Your lives will be regarded as rules. See then that you be exemplarily holy, particularly in all the relations of life, whether as husbands, or parents, or brothers, or masters, or neighbours. How shall he be accounted a good Ruling Elder who does not rule well his own family and dependants? How shall he persuade others to the worship of God in their families who is cold, and irregular, and negligent of that worship in his own? Be consistent, then, in character, and for this end be given to watchfulness and prayer. As the great body of men, among contending opinions and parties, will ever be guided in their judgment of the church by the character of its office-bearers—by their zeal and circumspection and fidelity and public spirit—these being things of which ALL can judge—or at least imagine so—so let me respectfully entreat you to give all the weight of your Christian influence to the cause of true religion; and to show that, in seasons of extraordinary trial, there is, on the part of the faithful men of Scotland, a courage and a liberality and devotedness, which can rise to their circumstances, and overmaster the most serious evils.¹

¹ I have been indebted for various suggestions in this chapter to an excellent Exhortation, in the ‘Vindication of Presbyterian Church Government, by London Ministers,’ in 1650, p. 73, &c. The enlightened and earnest addresses of the ministers of these days show what just views they had of church government and divine truth, and go to explain the remarkable courage and self-denial they manifested at the Restoration, when Presbyterian ministers, to the extent of two thousand in number, were ejected from their charges and homes on a single day, cheerfully suffering all for Christ—an example of magnanimity unsurpassed in the history of the Christian church, ancient or modern.

CHAPTER IX.

CHARGE TO THE CONGREGATION.

CHRISTIAN FRIENDS,

Having said this much to the Elders, I must close with a few words to the congregation; and though this sacred place be most unsuitable for any thing which even savours of human praise, yet I cannot refrain from declaring, that in all the steps which have been taken to enlarge the Eldership on this occasion, I have met with the most pleasing proofs of self-diffidence and self-distrust. This augurs well, and I hope will be properly appreciated by the congregation, and will deepen that esteem which in Christian duty it becomes them to render to those whom they have elected, and who are now clothed with a spiritual office of the Saviour's express appointment. I hope, too, that you will remember how disinterested are the services which the Eldership render to the church and to society—in how thankless a manner their best exertions are sometimes received—how much self-denial there is in men in business, frequently in pressing business, surrendering time, and submitting to trouble in investigating the cases of the poor and the friendless—how important are the advantages (now more important than ever,) of connecting the different ranks of society together, and creating good will, where there might otherwise be separation. I hope that, in addition to higher considerations, such as your spiritual oversight and the salvation of souls, you will not be insensible to these things, and that you will feel grateful to those who have for the first time undertaken the important and onerous duties of Elders, and to others who have persevered in them for years.

One of the most frequent errors into which, as regards the officers of religion, church members are apt to fall, is that of undervaluing and taking offence at

those judgments which they may feel constrained to form, and express on certain occasions as to conduct. But, is not this spirit most unreasonable? It not only injures them individually, but by depreciating the esteem in which they are held, you do what you can to frustrate the great objects of their ministry; and surely this must be displeasing in the sight of that God and that Redeemer, to whom the welfare of the church is dear as the apple of their eye? It should be remembered that our spiritual functions, as office-bearers in the church, are all for your edification and advantage. We have, and can have no object to serve, but your good. Errors we may commit, but they are not wilful. Hence, instead of being offended at the fidelity of our admonitions, you should receive them with meekness, as the suggestions of friendship. Did men only consider how grievous it must be to censure those whose highest interests it is the earnest prayer and unwearyed study of one's life to promote, they could not for a moment indulge one feeling of displeasure, much less exaggerate the errors, and misrepresent the motives of the very men whom they ought to regard and to love. I know that some are so prejudiced as to think, that the mere holding of office, whether civil or ecclesiastical, must *necessarily* lead to corruption and abuse. They are sensitively jealous of all that wears the aspect of authority. It is vain to reason with such persons. Their principles, or rather their prejudices, would subvert all government whatever.

So far from weakening the hands of the Kirk Session in the exercise of church discipline, whether it affects yourselves or others, let me counsel you to uphold that authority. There are not a few who are loud in their complaints of the alleged relaxation of discipline, who are among the first persons to cry out "persecution" when that discipline is actually applied. How few are there who follow the apostolic rule, of not so much as eating with a man who is under the serious discipline of the church. Alas! how many treat such persons in much the same way as if there were no ecclesiastical discipline at all. Some professed members of the church actually by their spirit and speech

and conduct, encourage others against its discipline. But, is not this daringly to sin against Christ? Does it not pour contempt upon his ordinances, prostrate the lawful power of his church officers, and harden offenders in their transgression?¹

Let me, then, exhort you to receive the Elders who have been ordained, as those who have rule over you in the Lord. Reverence their office, and submit to their spiritual authority. Do not be so unreasonable as to expect them to be perfect. Kindly interpret what at any time may seem amiss in their conduct. Cultivate acquaintance with them, and, instead of throwing obstacles in the way, give them every facility and encouragement in the performance of duty. Where they are unjustly assailed, boldly vindicate their character and reputation. Above all, strengthen and uphold and help them by your prayers. They feel that they need, and they will be happy to receive such assistance. Apostolic authority enjoins it, and your own good, as well as theirs, demands the exercise. Be instant, importunate, and persevering in prayer, in behalf of all the members of Session; and thus animated, we shall better pray and labour and live for you in return.

¹ In connection with this important point, I beg to refer the reader to an instructive and impressive discourse of President Edwards, 'on the Nature and End of Excommunication,' Works, vol. ii, p. 117.

CHAPTER X.

TESTIMONIES, FROM EXPERIENCE, TO THE SUCCESSFUL
OPERATION OF THE POPULAR ELECTION OF RULING
ELDERS.

KNOWING that friends in the ministry had made trial, as well as myself, of a more popular mode of appointment to the Eldership than had prevailed for a long time, I asked a few of them to favour me with a statement of their experience. Unwilling to swell this little work, I select only one or two; but the testimony of *all* is uniform and strong. If any thing be fitted to persuade others to make the trial in the same prayerful spirit, it is just such cases as the following. The reader will notice that the writers bring out different important views of the office, and incidentally answer current objections founded upon misapprehension.

Beginning with COUNTRY PARISHES, and the case of oldest date, I subjoin the reply of the minister of Carnock, in Fifeshire, to my application. With the exception of a village, in which there are a number of weavers, the population is entirely agricultural. At last census it amounted to 1202.

No. I.

"Carnock Manse, 16th March, 1841.

" My dear Sir,—..... Experiencing the difficulty of getting suitable persons to undertake the office of Elders in the congregation, and feeling the propriety of pursuing a more popular mode of appointment than generally obtains, I some years ago, when an increase in the number of Elders was greatly required for the congregation, proposed to the Session that the communicants, male and female, should be asked to give in a list of the names of such persons as they thought qualified for the office of Elder. To this proposal the

Session readily assented. And it was ordered to be intimated, "that the members of the congregation who are communicants be requested to name each four persons whom they consider proper for the office, in order that the Session may deal with them with reference to this office; and that a congregational meeting for prayer be held on Wednesday evening next with reference to this particular object." The meeting for prayer was held, and lists of names were given in to the Session, as resolved on. At another meeting of Session these lists were opened, and six individuals, who had the greater number of votes, were selected; and the minister was requested to converse with them, and to ascertain whether they would be willing to accept. The Session had every reason to be satisfied with the choice made by the communicants: all the individuals being just those whom they would themselves have selected. And our only regret was, that all could not be prevailed on to accept of the office. The mode pursued, indeed, was so satisfactory, that we do not contemplate any deviation from it, so long as we are not bound down to any other method by some explicit enactment of the church. It tends greatly, I think, to encourage and strengthen elders in the discharge of their official duty, inasmuch as they have thus an explicit call from the people themselves to take the oversight of them; and it lays a strong obligation upon the people to yield subjection to their spiritual office-bearers in the Lord, inasmuch as they, by their own act, have placed themselves under them, and professed their willingness to give them all honour. And in this way not only is the office of the Eldership elevated to somewhat of its proper status, but the bond which unites a Christian people with those that bear rule among them is strengthened, and the interests of the Redeemer's kingdom are greatly promoted.

Wishing you all success in your laudable design to improve the condition of the Eldership, and thus to extend the usefulness of the parochial arrangements of our church, I remain,

My dear Sir,

Yours faithfully,

Wm. GILSTON."

The next testimony is from the West of Scotland. The experiment is more recent, but it is most satisfactory. The population of the parish of West Kilbride, Presbytery of Irvine, is 1685.

No. II.

"Manse, West Kilbride, 28th April, 1841.

"Reverend and dear Sir,—I do not know if I can furnish you with a more simple and more distinct account of the circumstances which took place at the late election of Elders here than the one which I wrote at the time this election was made, and which was published in the 'Scottish Guardian'; it is as follows:—
"At the close of the service on the Sabbath which preceded our late thanksgiving day, I intimated to my people before I dismissed them that I wished an addition of three or four Elders to the Session, and that I would call upon all the male communicants of the congregation to select them by a deliberate and public vote. The thanksgiving day I fixed for this purpose; and when the services, which were the same as those of the Sabbath, were terminated, I requested all the male communicants—most of whom, I am happy to say, were present—to arrange themselves in pews in the area of the church, and the rest of the congregation to retire, or to occupy the galleries, as they thought proper. When this was done, I pointed out to those who were to vote the nature of the duty which they were now to discharge, mentioned the districts in which I wished the new Elders to be located, and prayed for Divine direction and guidance. After this, the election proceeded, by each communicant rising in his place, and in the order in which he sat, and naming, in an audible voice, four individuals whom he judged qualified to discharge the duties of the Eldership. And seldom, perhaps never, I am prepared to say, have I presided at a meeting where there seemed to prevail so great a solemnity of feeling, and so strong a desire to act conscientiously. And the selection made was most judicious; in short, just what I could have

wished; the very best men were fixed on by the people; and three of them, with their own consent, and with the approval of the previous members of Session, who did not vote, have been ordained by me, and are now as spiritual rulers, watching over those who have cordially invited them to take the oversight of them and their families."

Such is the mode in which I proceeded lately in adding to the number of the members of my Session; and looking back at the whole transaction, from this distance of time, I must here say, that it has powerfully served to convince me, that the heart of our people is yet in its right place, and that, were they properly treated by their spiritual rulers, and directed by them in a kindly and Christian manner, they would act a most conscientious and praiseworthy part in the election, both of their Elders and of their Ministers. The Elders that have been added to my Session through the suffrage of their fellow-communicants are proving themselves to be men of principle and piety, and are actively and cheerfully devoting themselves to the discharge of the duties of their office; and I now feel that I have no cause to regret, but every cause to rejoice at the step I took in calling upon my people to aid me in selecting fit individuals for the office of the Eldership.

I may mention here, that, for several years, prayer meetings have been held in various parts of the parish throughout the week: many of the more pious of the people have been in the habit of officiating; and sabbath evening classes have also been regularly taught under my own eye by several of my people; and all of the individuals elected to the Eldership had been engaged either in conducting some of the prayer meetings, or in teaching in the sabbath evening school; and this circumstance, no doubt, in conjunction with others, served to point them out to their fellow-communicants; but this, so far from being an argument against allowing the people to select their own Elders, is just a strong argument in favour of giving them this privilege, for it shows that they are ready to mark that conduct which indicates the existence of zeal and piety. True, it may be said, that in every instance, the people

may not have an opportunity to choose men who have been actively engaged in holding fellowship meetings and in instructing the young; but why should they not? If active measures are taken to call individuals forth to such Christian labours, in most instances they will succeed to the extent of furnishing out a sufficient number from which Elders may be selected; and, in general, it will be found, that those who have, previously to their becoming Elders, been engaged in benevolent Christian labours, will prove the most active and efficient rulers; at the same time, I by no means say, that this should be regarded as a rule from which no deviation should be made in choosing men for the Eldership; there are many other qualities besides that of having publicly laboured in instructing in Sabbath schools, sufficiently obvious to all, which may lead to the choice of individuals to hold the office of Elders.

Let me notice further, that there is another objection to the election of Elders by the people, met, I think, and refuted by the late election in this parish. It is often said, that if the people have the choice they will select men of vulgar minds, in short, men mean in birth and of no education. Now, the result of the election here was just this: the people selected an heritor of the parish, a respectable farmer, and a weaver; and could any other result have been more calculated to show, that they neither looked to the high, as if worshipping wealth; nor turned to the low, as if courting vulgarity, but turned their attention to all classes, in order to select the best men from each? indeed, though they had been previously instructed to make a choice that would refute the objection alluded to, they could not have acted in a way better fitted to do so than as I find they have done.

Upon the whole, I am satisfied, from what I have witnessed, that the people—the communicants I mean—might be safely entrusted with the privilege of selecting those whom they would have set over them as Elders, and I should rejoice to see them in the possession of this privilege: the Session always having the power to judge in regard to the selection they make, and to reject improper persons should they be chosen. May

you prosper in your efforts to introduce among us some such order as this.

Yours, with esteem,

THOS. FINDLAY."

Passing from rural to TOWN PARISHES, I subjoin the testimonies of the Rev. Mr. Bonar of the North Parish, Kelso—one of the Church Extension churches—and that of the Rev. Mr. Lewis of St. John's, Leith. The following is Mr. Bonar's statement of the *mode* which was adopted. The *result* was all that could be wished:—

No. III.

"The male communicants of the congregation were called on beforehand to give in lists of persons considered by them most suitable for the office of Eldership among them. Out of these lists the selection was made by the Kirk Session. Both before and after the choice was made, the congregation met together for special and solemn prayer in reference to the whole matter. On the evening set apart for the ordination of those who had thus been chosen, by the united voice of the congregation and Kirk Session, the congregation assembled for worship in the usual way. The sermon being finished, the minister, after reminding the people of the purpose on which they were come together, stated that all the steps had now been taken in this matter which the church required. The edict had been regularly served and returned, and no objection having been offered against any of the individuals named, it only remained to put to them the questions appointed to be put to Elders by Act of the Assembly 1700. The questions having been solemnly put to the individuals chosen, standing up before the people, and satisfying answers having been obtained, they were then ordained and set apart to the holy office of the Eldership by prayer. Thereafter they received from the brethren the right hand of fellowship as brother-rulers in the church and fellow-labourers in the Lord."

Mr. Lewis's excellent testimony is conveyed in the following terms:—

No. IV.

Leith, 18th March, 1841.

"My dear Sir,—I am perfectly satisfied that the introduction of the popular element into the choice of Elders would infuse new life into the body, not that I have unbounded confidence in the wisdom or piety of the people; but because I am persuaded that, even under a dead ministry, the people have fewer temptations to make a wrong choice, and are influenced by a higher sense of the solemnities and duties of the office than an indolent, careless, and worldly minister. Where a minister is faithful, he will instruct his people in the nature of the office, inform and guide their judgments, and qualify them for electing rightly; where he is unfaithful, he is certain to make a wrong choice himself, and his people cannot do worse. The probability is they will do better, and though under the guidance of no higher principle than natural conscience will elect men more worthy of the sacred office.

I have *twice* adopted the plan of consulting the congregation, and of receiving their recommendation of qualified persons. On both occasions I discoursed fully beforehand, on the nature and duties of the office, as described in Scripture, and laid down in the Acts of the Assembly; and held special prayer meetings for imploring Divine guidance to the congregation. In neither instance was I disappointed in the issue—more especially in the latter case, the six individuals recommended by the congregation were the very parties previously marked out by myself, and by the judgment of the Session, as qualified for the office.

The plan I adopted was, first of all, to inform the congregation of the desire of the Kirk Session to add to their number, and the necessity of this for the better oversight of the congregation and parish. I then requested the *male communicants* to give in, in writing, the names of six persons judged by them qualified for the office, appointing, at the same time, a special meeting of prayer for their direction, for reading the Acts

of the Assembly relating to the office, and, in general, for discoursing on its functions and spiritual nature. Two Sabbaths were allowed for the giving in of the lists, which were afterwards opened and read at a meeting of Session, and the names of the parties nominated arranged, according to the number of the votes. The result I have already mentioned.

It has usually been supposed, that so great is the eagerness of the members of a church to exercise their privilege of election, that rather than not use it, when in their power, they will vote rashly, indiscriminately, and without sufficient knowledge or acquaintance with the persons whom they nominate. My experience in my own congregation is the reverse of this. I would say, there is a reluctance rather than an over-eagerness to use the privilege, proceeding not from indifference, but from a conscientious fear of recommending beyond their knowledge, and from the difficulty of finding persons in the circle of their Christian acquaintances reaching to their standard of qualification. Many of our lists when opened, instead of six names, which were desired, contained only four, or three, or two, and some only one, with the statement annexed, that they could conscientiously recommend the individual named, but had not sufficient acquaintance with any other member of the church.

Indeed, I am satisfied that where, previous to an election, the office is made the subject of special discourse, and the conscience of a congregation charged as to the responsibility and solemnity of appointing rulers over them in the Lord, and divine direction sought by supplication and prayer, there will be greater danger of the members of the church abstaining from the use of their privilege, than of exercising it with inconsiderate eagerness and in ignorance of the parties to whom they give their voice. Every thing, however, depends upon the spirit with which an election is conducted. A greater curse cannot alight upon a congregation than when the election either of its ministers or elders is conducted in a factious, caballing, prayerless, and worldly spirit.

With best wishes and prayers for the success of your present labours—Believe me,

Ever yours faithfully,

JAMES LEWIS."

No. V.

Already several cases in Glasgow, where ministers acted on the same plan adopted in St. David's, and with similar success, could be appealed to, as in Wellpark and St. Peters; but it is unnecessary. I may merely transcribe a note from the Rev. Mr. Somerville, of Anderston.

Glasgow, April 30th, 1841.

"My dear Sir,—In answer to your enquiry I may state, that on a late occasion a body of 10 individuals was added to Anderston Kirk Session—that these persons were nominated by communicants, and not merely were such as the existing Kirk Session unanimously approve of, but were just those whom they would have desired to see clothed with the office of Ruling Elder.

I may mention also, that the congregation met, on two occasions, previous to the nomination, for the purpose of seeking guidance from the Great Head of the church, and that, moreover, a season for special private fasting and prayer with reference to the object was appointed. The congregation were called upon *twice* to elect, first 12 and then 6, to the office of Elder. The second was necessary, owing to several in the first list having declined to join the Session. In both cases the result was most satisfactory. The communicants who voted on both occasions were the *very persons* in whose judgment and piety I would antecedently have had the greatest confidence.

With the favour of the Glorious Master of our assemblies, the additional superintendence under which the congregation is now placed promises to be a great blessing to it.

Believe me, my dear Sir,

Most truly yours,

ALEX. N. SOMERVILLE."

In the Presbyterian Church of Ireland, the appointment is becoming more popular than it once was. The Rev. Mr. Denham of Londonderry, who has, in the 'Plea of Presbytery,' proved himself an able and enlightened Presbyterian writer, two years ago issued a circular to his congregation, descriptive of the authority and qualification and duties of the Ruling Elder, and accompanied it with the following note.

"My dear friend, I earnestly request you will now make the election of Elders amongst us the subject of your *serious consideration and earnest prayer*, and without being guided by the opinion of others, state to me, in a sealed letter, on or before the 6th of October, the names of those *members* of the church, not exceeding six in number, whom you esteem best qualified for this important office. To those for whom there shall be a majority of votes, I shall state their duties more fully, and the names of such as shall consent to be ordained I shall make publicly known to the congregation. Earnestly praying the Head of the church to direct you in this solemn work,

I remain,

Your affectionate Pastor,

JAMES DENHAM."

The plan wrought remarkably well. After being on probation for some time the Elders will be ordained, and as there is no notice of any ordination in the New Testament except by imposition of hands, Mr. Denham writes me that it is contemplated to set them apart to the office in this way. The average number of Elders in the Presbyterian Church of Ireland is between eight and nine to a congregation.

A P P E N D I X.

SUCCESSFUL MORAL OPERATION OF PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH GOVERNMENT ON SOCIETY.

(*Referred to page 3 of Preface.*)

THE presence or absence of crime is not an *infallible* test of the efficiency or otherwise of the religious system under which a country is placed. At least various circumstances have to be taken into account in forming the estimate apart from the influence of religion. There may be great simplicity of manners, and few temptations to crime, and considerable external correctness in countries where Christianity is unknown, or where false views of it prevail—at the same time the state of crime furnishes an approximation to the truth of no small importance. So tried, the result is highly honourable to Presbyterianism, as compared with other forms of church government. Presbyterianism is predominant in Scotland—and what is the result? According to the new Anglican non-Protestant school, the moral character of the people should be very low—their ministers have no episcopal ordination—religious ordinances are invalid—they can only, like so many Pagans, be committed to the “uncovenanted mercies of God.” On the principle that a tree is best known by its fruits, deplorable should be the moral condition of Scotland as compared with England where prelacy is predominant, and in the Popish countries where prelacy is, if possible, still more powerful, as in Ireland. Let the following facts, drawn from a paper of Mr. Miller, Captain of Police in

Glasgow, and recently read before the 'British Association' for promoting science, testify:—Out of a population of 175,000 under his superintendence, 2952 were brought before the magistrates of Glasgow—in eleven months of the last year—charged with various offences; of these, 711, or nearly *one-third*, belonged to Ireland, and 2154 to Scotland. The Irish proportion of vagrants in Glasgow bears a still higher ratio; but supposing all her offenders to be Scottish, how does the amount of crime in Glasgow stand on a comparison with that of two large towns similar to itself—Liverpool and Dublin? It appears from the same document, that while there is in Glasgow 1 offender to $22\frac{3}{4}$ of the population—(this was for the year 1839; the number of offenders was much smaller in 1840)—there is in Liverpool 1 in 16; and in Dublin 1 in 7; and the result is the more striking, when it is remembered that, from the structure of the houses, &c., the facilities to depredation are far greater in Glasgow than in the other towns; and, moreover, that there is a police force in Liverpool of 1 officer to every 442 persons; and Dublin of 1 to every 256; while in Glasgow there is only 1 to 784. In London the proportion of offenders to the whole population is much the same as in Glasgow; but the two places do not admit well of comparison in crime, London has proportionally *double* the number of police-officers.

Turning from the great western metropolis of Scotland, where, from various causes, crime may be expected to be most prevalent—to the rural districts where the influence of Christianity, flowing through Presbyterian channels, is less disturbed, what is the moral condition of the people, tried by the same standard? It appears from an important document, by Messrs. Fullarton & Baird, "Remarks on the evils at present affecting the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, 1838," read before the Statistical Society of Glasgow, that, in fifty-four parishes, to which their attention was recently and carefully directed in connection with destitution of the means of life, and proposals for emigration—parishes embracing a population of nearly 155,000 souls—there were in 1835 only 142 cases of offence, and these, for the most part, very trifling. In many of the

parishes there had not been a single crime for years, and *that* though the people, from various causes, are no strangers to indolence and the use of ardent spirits—the usual inlets of much evil, and are besides, unhappily, very defectively supplied with the means of education. The result is the more remarkable when it is remembered, to use the language of the writers, that in the whole of the Islands and Mainland parishes to which they refer, “the face of a soldier or policeman, as such, is not known; and that in spite of all the poverty and wretchedness to which, especially for the last few years, the people have been exposed, there have not been the slightest indications of riot or disturbance.” The statement may be extended to the rural parts and many of the towns of Scotland generally. The writers give 2838 persons as the whole number committed for trial in Scotland during the same year. How large a proportion of these were neither Scotchmen nor Presbyterians we have no means of ascertaining; but there can be little doubt that it was very considerable. Are such facts discreditable to a Presbyterian country? or can the friends of the new Anglican school point to results equally satisfactory under their system?¹

¹ It may be noticed in passing that Scotland gets credit, or rather reproach, for a much larger share of crime than *really* belongs to her. The able Sheriff of Glasgow, Mr. Alison, in his work on ‘The Principles of Population,’ states that the progress of crime in Scotland during the last thirty years has been almost unexampled; and no doubt there has been a very appalling increase though the greatly improved efficiency of the police in bringing up every case makes what exists much more visible than it was before. But it is overlooked how large a proportion of crime, and that, too, of the worst character, is not of Scottish origin, but springs from the Irish population, who have now the easiest communication, particularly with the west of Scotland. In cases of capital crimes, the number of instances where the parties are Roman Catholics may satisfy any one that they are seldom natives of Scotland. A sad illustration of the truth of these remarks has occurred as these pages are passing through the press. Three *Irishmen*—Roman Catholics—have been condemned at the Spring Assizes to be executed for the atrocious murder of an *Englishman* on the Edinburgh and Glasgow Railway, and yet, though no Scotchman had any hand in the deed, the case will go to swell the returns of crime from Scotland, and to leave those at a distance, who are ignorant of the circumstances, under the impression

The practical efficiency of Presbyterianism in Ireland is similar. "What we give," says the Rev. Mr. Denham of Londonderry, "to the State in return for our endowment is that sound Christian education which secures the peace and the prosperity of the country, and secures it, too, at an expence vastly less than by any other means hitherto discovered. On examination, it will be found that the endowment given to the Presbyterian church in this country has been, in place of an expenditure, a direct and positive economy. If you take up the expence of the constabulary for the past year, you will find it small in the counties of Ulster in proportion to the number of Presbyterians inhabiting those counties. Thus, for instance, in the county of Cavan, where there are few Presbyterians, the cost of

that horrible crimes are greatly on the increase in this once religious, moral, and happy land. I rejoice that if Scotland receives criminals from popish Ireland, she cherishes no revenge. An important report has just been published by Captain Miller of the Glasgow Police, from which it appears that out of 1038 destitute persons, supplied with extra food and clothing during the winter months, not less than 310 were natives of Ireland. The numbers are—

Persons belonging to England,.....	4
Do. do. to Ireland,.....	310
Do. do. to Scotland,.....	721
Unknown,.....	3
	1038

While this is honourable to the philanthropy of Scotland, it also shows, in harmony with other facts, that a large share of the population most exposed to the temptations of crime do not belong to this country. How unjust is it, indiscriminately, to reckon all these to the account of Scottish crime! There ought to be a deduction of at least a *third* from the crime of Scotland, as not properly belonging to it. That there is nothing in the character of Irishmen which of itself tends to the breach of law is manifest from the interesting results brought out in Presbyterian Ulster. It is the religious system, though claiming a prelatic "unbroken succession," which is at the root of the evil. What can be more monstrous than the idea that the Irish murderers, having all been validly baptised by an ordained priest of the Church of Rome according to "apostolic succession," are regenerated, and belong to the true church, while the holiest men of Presbyterian Scotland or Ireland have only an invalid baptism, and are beyond the pale of the visible church; and if saved at all, are saved only as the heathens are supposed to be saved—by "the uncovenanted mercies of God!"

the constabulary to each inhabitant is $10\frac{1}{2}$ d., while in Down the cost to each is only $5\frac{1}{2}$ d. In Fermanagh, where there are few Presbyterians, the cost to each is $9\frac{3}{4}$ d., while in Derry it is not $5\frac{1}{4}$ d. Again, comparing the cost on the whole province with that on the other provinces, it would be to each inhabitant of Ulster $7\frac{3}{4}$ d., and to each in the rest of the kingdom 1s. $5\frac{1}{2}$ d., making a saving in Ulster of a sum not less than £88,833 18s. 10d. Again, the jail expence to each inhabitant in Ulster is $1\frac{3}{4}$ d. The jail expence to each inhabitant of the rest of the kingdom is $2\frac{1}{2}$ d. Thus saving, on the whole inhabitants of Ulster, £7138 16s. 8d., making a saving on those two items of constabulary and jails of £95,972 15s. 8d., being nearly three times the amount paid to all the Presbyterian clergy in Ireland.

The unfortunate persons sentenced to transportation are sent from all the northern counties to the hulk at Kingstown previous to embarkation. Out of 3013 who were there in the five years from 1830, only 77 were Presbyterians, that is only 1 in every 39. Now each costs the government about £100, or on the whole number £301,300, so that here, by the peculiarly virtuous, and industrious, and peaceable habits of our people, there is another very large sum saved to the nation every year. Allow me here to quote a sentence from a letter transmitted by Lord Normanby, secretary to the colonies, to a commission of the Church of Scotland, dated June, 1839 :—"While it was recently found necessary (in New South Wales) to appoint Episcopalian and Roman Catholic chaplains for the jails and penal settlements, it was allowed on all hands that there was no necessity for the appointment of Presbyterian chaplains for these establishments, the number of criminals of this communion in the colony being quite insignificant." In the seven years from 1828, two hundred and fifty-six persons were hung in Ireland, while, by a strict examination of all the jails in Ulster, I have discovered that in the twelve years which have now nearly elapsed since 1828, only *four* Presbyterians were executed. It were evidently impossible to make any calculation as to what each of these unfortunate persons cost the kingdom not merely in the retarding of improvement and

preventing the flow of capital into the country, but even in the mere expence of apprehension, imprisonment, judges, queen's counsel, attorneys, executioners, &c. But the sum between the loss and the actual expence must have been enormous. Yet in this item of expenditure the Presbyterian proportion is so small as scarcely to be named.

Thus have I shown, by a reference to facts and figures, that if the government give the Presbyterian church a small endowment, it is not necessary for her, in order to make an honest and adequate return, to barter away or part with one fraction of the liberty wherewith Christ has made her free. She makes to the state an ample return in the form of an immense saving of the public funds secured, and of many and most valuable benefits conferred."¹

Nor do Scotland and Ireland, surveyed in the light of witnesses to the moral operation of Presbyterianism upon society, stand alone. Even England, during the short period that Presbytery had the ascendency, in the 17th century, gave evidence of the same moral tendencies. The circumstances were very disadvantageous for trying any religious system. Civil wars, followed by a flood of religious sectaries, (who, for the most part, hated Presbyterianism as much as they hated Episcopacy,) must have operated most injuriously upon the peace and purity of society ; and yet, even in these adverse circumstances, bishop Burnet could say, " Then was good justice done, and vice was suppressed and punished, so that we always reckon these eight years of usurpation a time of great peace and prosperity ;" and Neal, the Nonconformist historian, states of the same period that one might walk even the streets of London on a Sabbath evening without seeing an idle person, or hearing an oath, nay, without hearing any sounds save those of prayer and praise.

Similar fruit appeared wherever the same religious system was introduced. The pilgrim fathers of New England, and their immediate descendants, were substantially Presbyterian—and what was the result? Disdaining Episcopal ordination, and " uninterrupted

¹ "Plea of Presbytery," pp. 409, 410.

succession," as unwarranted by any scriptural or apostolic authority, were the people left without the grace of valid ordinances, and, by consequence, the prey of the worst individual and social disorders? Far from it. Very many of the first founders, who had resided at Leyden, on their departure from Holland for America, received from the magistrates of that town the attestation that, though they had lived twelve years among them, no suit or accusation had ever been preferred against any one of the English. And a modern historian (Graham) speaking of the character of New England, after its religious system had been long in operation, expresses himself in the following terms:—“Perhaps no country in the world was ever more distinguished than New England at that time for the general prevalence of those sentiments and habits that render communities respectable and happy. Sobriety and industry pervaded all classes of the inhabitants. The laws against immorality of every description were remarkably strict, and not less strictly executed; and being cordially supported by public opinion, they were able to render every vicious and profligate excess equally dangerous and infamous to the perpetrator. There was not a single beggar in the whole province. The general diffusion of education caused national advantages, which were thus vigorously improved, to be justly appreciated, and an ardent and enlightened patriotism knit the hearts of the people to each other and to the country.” Where has, or when will, Puseyism present such a picture?

CONVERSIONS FROM INDEPENDENCY TO PRESBYTERY.

DR. OWEN AND PRESIDENT EDWARDS.

(Referred to p. 55.)

The high character, talent, acquirements, and public usefulness of Dr. Owen are well known. His works have been esteemed and honoured wherever evangelical religion is appreciated, and, probably, are destined to exert a salutary influence on the Christian church in generations to come. His original views and connections seem to have been Presbyterian; but when about thirty

years of age his mind underwent a change on church government and order, and though never keen or violent on such points, yet he became decidedly an Independent. It is well to bear in mind that an Independent in those days was, as the reader will see from what has been already said—in various and important respects a different person from an Independent in more modern times. Congregational views were quite consistent with the maintenance of the principles of Church and State, and hence Owen both ably vindicated civil establishments of the true religion, and himself derived part of his support from public funds. The same views were consistent with the office of Ruling Elder, and Courts of Appeal and Review in the Christian church, which are now appropriate to Presbyterianism; and hence Owen advocated both—in the last extending his advocacy to Provincial Synods, as well as General Assemblies.¹ With all this, he was decidedly ranked with the Independents of the age in which he lived—a remarkable proof of which is, that he was asked to preach to the remains of the Parliament which had taken off the head of Charles I, a request which he fulfilled by preaching on the very day after the execution of the unhappy monarch. No one who knows any thing of the parties of that period can imagine that had he belonged to the Presbyterians, who were universally the strenuous and undaunted advocates of the king, he would have been asked for such a service. The Independents evidently wished to shelter themselves under one of the most respectable and esteemed men of their party; but after the study and experience of thirty years, and, above all, such years as those in which it was his lot to live, his mind recurred to its original principles. Two years before his death, towards the close of the sad reign of Charles II, he expressed himself in one of his latest works—his “Enquiry into the original of Evangelical Churches,” &c.—with a manifest leaning towards Presbyterianism, substantially declaring, that had Presbytery been established at the king’s Restoration, twenty years before, he would have been satisfied. But there is still more than this: It appears, from the MSS. *Analecta* of the

¹ See *Gospel Church*, p. 426.

accurate and indefatigable historian Wodrow, that Dr. Owen on his deathbed gave forth a testimony in behalf of Presbytery. The statement, which is under date 1716, runs in these terms—"Mr George Redpath told me, two or three years ago, when in Edinburgh, that he visited Dr. Owen on his deathbed, and Presbytery and Episcopacy came to be discoursed of; and the Doctor said how he had seen his mistake as to the Independent way, and declared to him a day or two before his death, that after his utmost search into the Scriptures and antiquity, he was now satisfied that Presbytery was the way Christ had appointed in his New Testament church." Of course the question cannot be settled by human authority; the word of God is the only standard. But all parties, even those who are loudest in their appeal to the Scriptures, are forward to plead the testimony of distinguished writers, when it makes in favour of their views. And in the present case, no testimony can be more unexceptionable; it is the testimony of one of unimpeachable integrity, profoundly learned in Scripture and ecclesiastical history, and at the close of life, after full experience of an opposite system.

Nor does he stand alone: one not less distinguished in the Christian church, a century after, passed through a similar change. Jonathan Edwards, one of the first of divines, in a letter to the Rev. Dr. Erskine of Edinburgh, under date July, 1750, after a great work of revival, in which he had been honoured to bear a part, on being asked whether he would accept a charge in Scotland, which it was thought could be obtained, as a way of extricating him from the difficulties in which he became involved with his Independent flock, writes,— "As to my subscribing to the substance of the Westminster Confession, there would be no difficulty, and as to the Presbyterian government, I have *long* been perfectly out of conceit of our unsettled Independent confused way of church government in this land, and the Presbyterian way has ever appeared to me as most agreeable to *the word of God, and the nature and reason of things*—though I cannot say that I think that the Presbyterian government of the Church of Scotland is so perfect that it cannot, in some respects, be mend-

ed."¹ He then refers to domestic reasons for remaining in New England.

After such cases of conversion to Presbytery, it may be hoped that party writers, whether Episcopal or Congregational, will allow that the claims of Presbyterianism are not quite absurd, and that its friends must have something to say for themselves.

THE SENTIMENTS OF CALVIN ON THE RULING ELDER.

(*Referred to p. 64.*)

The pre-eminent greatness of Calvin, the ignorant and embittered virulence with which, in later times, his memory has been assailed, and the peculiar circumstances in regard to the Ruling Elder in which, in the providence of God, he was placed, all render some notice of his sentiments on the subject more than usually appropriate. To those who are acquainted with the history of the Christian church since the period of the Reformation, and of Calvin's character and influence as connected with it, it is not necessary to say any thing of the high talents, classical literature, profound professional learning, personal disinterestedness, and extensive public usefulness of the great Genevan Reformer. The man who at twenty-seven years of age could publish such a work as the *Christian Institutes*, and who has stamped his name and influence upon Europe, so that, after the lapse of nearly 300 years, the impress is fresh and strong, and is daily becoming more conspicuous; the man who withal was so self-denied as to be contented with no higher provision than a salary of a hundred crowns a-year, who, with all his works, (12 vols. folio,) left only 300 crowns behind him, such a mind and heart must obviously have been one of God's rarest gifts to the church and the world.²

It were easy to fill pages with the mere record of Calvin's praise, proclaimed by the most opposite, and, at the same time, most competent judges. I might remind the reader how Infidels, such as d'Alembert and

¹ Dwight's *Memoirs of Edwards*, p. 143, vol. i, of Works.

² His salary as professor of divinity was 150 francs in money, 15 measures of corn, and 2 tuns of wine."—Hugues.

Voltaire, have been constrained to speak in the highest terms of his scholarship, and of his services to Geneva as a republic. I might refer to the testimony of De Thou, and of Scaliger, and of more congenial minds, such as good Bishop Andrews, who thought his name should *never* be mentioned without a preface of the highest honour —of Grindal, and Whitgift, and Jewell, and Philpot, and Hall, and Hooker, and Stillingfleet, and Horsley, and many of the most eminent names in the Church of England: nor should the testimony of holy Richard Baxter, whose praise is in all the churches, be forgotten. “I know no man,” says he, “since the Apostles’ days, whom I value and honour more than Calvin, and whose judgment in all things, with another, I more esteem and come nearer to.”¹

But one of the highest proofs of his character and influence, and what should weigh strongly with many of those who hate his very name, is to be found in the fact, that though an enlightened and resolute Presbyterian, he was consulted by, and largely aided the most eminent Reformers of the English church in their reformation. It is not so generally known as it should be, that Calvin corresponded with Cranmer, and the Protector Somerset, and Edward VI, and various others. He revised the English liturgy, and freed it from various popish tenets and observances, and, by his works, co-operated in the construction of the Thirty-nine Articles, part of the seventeenth being evidently taken from his ‘Institutes.’ Nor is this all: his celebrated work was used as a text-book at the English universities during the greater part of a century, when there were not more than five Anti-Calvinistic professors, and they were censured. Young divines made it the foundation of their discourses—a convocation at Oxford recommended it to the universal attention of the nation—and if Stapleton, a British Roman Catholic, may be believed, it was in many cases even “fixed in the parish churches for the people to read.” In short, there is no single individual, perhaps, who ever commanded such wide-spread veneration and influence in the Church of England, in her best times, and with her best men, as John Calvin of Geneva. How strange,

¹ Saint’s Everlasting Rest, ch. xiv, sec. 10.

then, is it that his name and memory should now be treated with so much enmity by many of the ministers and members of the same church, except when they meet with a few detached words in his voluminous works which seem to admit of being twisted into a favourable concession in behalf of Episcopacy : then forthwith he becomes the object of respect and praises.

It is difficult to know how to deal with some of the modern opponents of Calvin. One moment we are taught that Presbyterianism and the Ruling Elder have no authority in Scripture or church history, but originated with this Reformer at Geneva, in the early part of the sixteenth century ; next moment we are informed that he is not a Presbyterian, and has a great favour for Episcopacy. All this shows, however unwilling men may be to confess it, the felt importance and power of Calvin's testimony to the government and order of the Christian church. To say that Presbytery and its Ruling Elders originated with him is preposterous : they are to be found in the word of God ; and the earliest ecclesiastical history. Nay there was a Presbytery at Geneva—a Presbytery by which he was ordained, according to Beza, in August, 1536—long before he ever visited that renowned city. On the other hand, he was not latitudinarian, as has been alleged at the outset, in his views of church government and order. The strongest and clearest views of Presbyterianism, including the Ruling Elder, are to be found in his 'Institutes,' his first work, published before it was known whether he was to be a minister of the Reformed church at all, and at a time when all his early prejudices and prepossessions, as a recent member of the church of Rome, must have been in favour of Prelacy. His circumstances then were highly favourable to impartiality of judgment. He expressly founded, not upon policy but upon Scripture, and, moreover, he consistently adhered through life, and to the day of death, to the sentiments which he had at an early period published to the world ; he was an ordained minister of the Presbyterian church of Geneva ; his advice was asked in reference to the churches of Scotland and of France, and both are strictly Presbyterian ; also, his last will and testament

bear witness to his unshaken confidence in the scriptural principles of Presbytery. The two or three passages in his immense works which have been supposed to bear a friendly eye to Episcopacy, have been and can be easily and satisfactorily explained. Anxiety to prevent the Presbyterian party in the Church of England from separating from her communion while there was the prospect of a more extensive reformation in her constitution seem to be the origin of the most plausible of the number. And surely it is a different thing *to approve* of a constitution and to recommend men *to bear with it* till they can get a better !

There is nothing then to invalidate the weight of Calvin's testimony to Presbyterian Church Government ; on the contrary, there is every thing to enforce it. It is of early date—impartially formed—protracted—consistent—and when we think how pre-eminent and distinguished and honoured of God the witness is, the force of his testimony must be felt the more powerful.

With respect particularly to the Ruling Elder, there is, as already hinted, an historical circumstance, or circumstances, which add to the weight of even so distinguished a testimony as Calvin's. His mind was at an early period, and in a peculiar degree, drawn to the subject of church discipline. Anxious to quell unseemly feuds, which at the dawn of the Reformation tore asunder the leading families of Geneva, and otherwise maintain the honour of Christ's house, he, in common with his colleagues, resolved, and publicly declared his resolution of purging the roll of communicants. He solemnly proclaimed from the pulpit, "I will die sooner than this hand shall reach the symbols of the Lord's body to any one who has been found a despiser of God."

Though a considerable time before this Presbyterian church government had been established at Geneva, and Calvin in his Institutes had published his views on the office of Ruling Elder, yet this part of the organisation of the Christian church does not seem to have been put into actual, or, at least, vigorous operation. Hence Calvin and his colleague, instead of being officially supported by a large and influential body of el-

ders, were left to endure alone the opposition which the strict exercise of discipline seldom fails to awaken. The hostility, both from the magistrates and the populace, was so violent—probably the one occasioning the other—that the faithful ministers were driven from Geneva. Calvin took refuge in Strasburg, where he remained for four years, having been appointed professor of theology in the university. It was when here that he was led more fully to study the office of the Ruling Elder, especially in connection with the history of the Bohemian and Waldensian churches, which could trace their origin to a very remote antiquity, and which had always enjoyed the advantage of a numerous and powerful body of such officers. Calvin clearly saw that it was only an ecclesiastical staff of this kind which could remedy such disorders as those which had prevailed at Geneva; that, in short, had the ministers been supported by a suitable body of representatives from the congregation, the tumult would, in all probability, never have occurred. Hence, when recalled to Geneva, which he speedily was, by all parties, in the dread, in his absence, of a return of Popery, he took care that the office of Ruling Elder should be immediately placed upon an adequate foundation. We do not read after this of any serious difficulties in connection with the exercise of church discipline. There is one sentence of Bishop Jewell which opens up an opposite and most pleasing view—"If you had ever known," says he to his Popish antagonist¹ "the order of the church of Geneva, and had seen *four thousand people or more* receiving the holy mysteries together at one communion, you could not, without great shame and want of modesty, have untruly published to the world that by Mr. Calvin's doctrine the sacraments of Christ are superfluous."

Considering the circumstances which have been detailed, we need not wonder at Calvin's warm attachment to the office of Ruling Elder. They insured a more thorough study of the whole subject by his powerful mind—interesting his feelings as well as his judgment—and hence the result is the more satisfactory. Let no one think the less highly of the great

¹ Defence of his Apology, p. 188.

Reformer because he was the victim for a season of popular hostility in such a cause. The question which was really at stake is the same which is at present agitating Scotland, namely—Whether, when the church refuses privileges to those whom she deems unworthy, her judgment is to be subject to the review, and may be overthrown by the sentence of civil judges? The principles involved in this question are worth suffering for. In all probability were Christian churches now to act with the same fidelity as Calvin and his colleagues, in the administration of church discipline, they would awaken similar commotions in society. Many who can hear sound doctrine, cannot endure sound discipline: so to speak, they can be reconciled to the prophetic and the priestly offices of Christ, but the kingly—the royal office—is the last to which they are willing to submit. The Rev. M. Hugues, pastor of Grand Gallargues, in a notice of Calvin, says, in reference to the passage in his history which we have been considering:—“Calvin wished to reform the dissolute manners of the inhabitants of Geneva. For this end, he published a catechism and confession of faith, which were accepted by the General Assembly of the people in 1537; but when he wished to apply his principles, and pursue his reformation, he met with the most serious resistance. A party of libertines, seeing themselves menaced in their corruptions, accused Calvin of wishing to establish an authority as tyrannical as that of the Pope: then commenced a violent commotion between Calvin and the people, in which the *libertines* triumphed and obtained in 1538 the banishment of Farel and of Calvin. When the Reformer received the order to quit the town, he exclaimed—“Si nous avions servi les hommes nous aurions été bien mal récompensés, mais nous servons un Maître qui loin de ne pas recompenser ses serviteurs leur paie ce qu'il ne doit pas.”¹

And as none, I trust, will think the less of the great Reformer, because he was banished from Geneva for righteousness' sake, so I trust that few will esteem him

¹ “If we had served men we would have been ill rewarded, but we serve a Master who, far from not recompensing his servants, pays them what he does not owe.”

the less highly for the part which he is alleged to have had in the death of Servetus. The pertinacious zeal with which men have endeavoured to stain the memory and weaken the influence of Calvin for deeds which would have been nothing thought of in others at the same period, is a striking proof of the hatred of the natural mind to the truths and institutions of the Gospel for which he so nobly contended. Any who will take the trouble to examine the cases of severity and cruelty which are charged against Calvin will find them, on investigation, to melt away into nothing, if not to give evidence of a meekness and long-suffering which it would be well for his accusers to copy. With regard to the most serious case—that of Servetus—Sennebier, an able French writer, who does not hold the religious sentiments of Calvin, but who has carefully examined the proof, states that the accusation is a cruel calumny—that none of his enemies in the day in which he lived, though sufficiently numerous and bitter, ever dared to whisper such an imputation against him—that, so far from taking a part in, or wishing the death of the arch-heretic, he warned him not to come to Geneva, because, from the temper of the times, and the laws of the state, there was great danger—that he would fall a sacrifice to the intolerance of the age—and that, after the sentence was passed, the Reformer used all his influence, unavailingly, to obtain a mitigation of its severity, and sincerely deplored the result. It is to be remembered that all the Cantons of Switzerland unanimously approved the sentence—that the meek Melancthon, most of the English, as well as the Foreign Reformers—particularly Cranmer and Hall—all approved the putting Servetus to death; and let it also be borne in mind, that if Calvin had been an instrument—which he was not—of the death of a *single* heretic, those are not his most appropriate accusers and condemners, who extol Cranmer and Whitgift, and, above all, Archbishop Laud—men who are justly chargeable with tenfold more severity and bloodshed than Calvin or the entire Presbyterian church ever perpetrated. See Melchior Adamus' Life of Calvin, and Sennebier's Literary History of Geneva, and Toplady's Historic Proof, &c.

PRESENT STATE OF ELDERS IN THE REFORMED CHURCHES OF THE CONTINENT.

(*Referred to in page 67.*)

WITH the decline of religion on the continent, the eldership in the Presbyterian churches declined, till, in some cases, it seems to have been almost obliterated. With the revival of evangelical religion, the office is reviving. In the Canton of Vaud, in Switzerland, where the progress of religion has of late years been most marked, the faithful ministers are busily engaged in reviving this part of the ancient government of the church which had disappeared under the reign of Socinianism. Along with this they are recalling the discipline of the church, and guarding its ordinances against promiscuous admission.

In the French Protestant church there are nine hundred elders, but the footing on which they stand is now quite Erastian. The appointment turns on the payment of a certain rate of civil taxes, and is under the control of the government. The office is not a permanent one. A few years ago, Guizot, the present prime minister of France, was a member of the consistory, as elder of the Protestant church of Paris. But even here there is growing improvement.

In the Dutch church the eldership appears still to survive in considerable efficiency. The choice is made solely on moral and religious grounds, and substantially the appointment to the pulpit is vested in the (kirkenraden,) or kirk-session; but the session is not only very limited in number, but by law must be so, and the members are changed every two years, at the same time eligible to re-election. As the church revives in her evangelical tone—(and it is possible that the Popish movements of the new king, which are calling forth so intense a Protestant feeling, may, in the Providence of God, hasten it)—it is probable that she will extend her eldership, and add to the spiritual efficiency of the office.

NOTES ON WITCHCRAFT, AS A MATTER OF ECCLESIASTICAL DISCIPLINE.

(*Referred to in page 117.*)

IT is not generally known to what an extent a belief in witchcraft, and in the propriety of severe repressing punishments, prevailed in the Christian church generally long before, as well as after the Reformation—in Popish as well as Protestant countries. About 1515, Delrio, an historian, tells us that 500 persons were executed in Geneva in three months for witchcraft. In the diocese of Como, in Italy, one thousand were executed in a year, and for some time after about one hundred a year. In Lorraine, in fifteen years, Remigius boasts of nine hundred having been burnt; and in France, about 1520, the numbers were incredible. In Germany the state of things was fearful. In Wurtzburg, in two years and two months, one hundred and fifty-seven persons suffered, and among them were many little children, and not less than fourteen vicars of the cathedral. In a small district (Lindheim) of six hundred persons, not less than thirty, being a twentieth part of the population, were burnt in the four years, 1660—1664. It is estimated that, putting the Roman Catholic and Protestant provinces of Germany together, there could not be less, from beginning to end of the delusion, than one hundred thousand sufferers!

Sad as matters were in Britain, they were inconsiderable compared with such doings as these—but they were bad enough. Bacon was Member of Parliament, and Coke was Attorney-General when one of the witchcraft statutes was enacted, and Sir Matthew Hale, as judge, passed sentence of death in such cases without a disturbing scruple, and Sir Thomas Brown was an approving witness! When such men could not shake themselves free from the delusion, is it wonderful that Presbyterian kirk sessions laboured under its influence? Grey, the editor of Hudibras, states that he perused a list of 3000 who were executed in England for witchcraft during the reign of the Long Parliament alone.

The entire number in that country are estimated by Barrington at 30,000.

The records in Scotland have, perhaps, been more thoroughly scrutinised than in any other country, and they are sufficiently appalling, but the executions do not seem to have exceeded, if they proportionably equalled those of the sister land. From 1572, when the first trial for witchcraft appears on the record of the Court of Justiciary, down to 1625, a period of 53 years, there were 35 trials, which almost all terminated in a capital sentence: this is not one in a year. From 1625 to 1640, a period of 15 years, there are only seven executions—no serious number, compared with similar proceedings in other countries. From 1640 down to 1649—the strongest *Presbyterian period*—though many steps were taken in connexion with the crime, there does not seem to have been any encrease of executions; there appears rather to have been a decline in numbers—the precise numbers are not given. From 1649 to the Restoration in 1660 there is a decided encrease—29 executions in 12 years—17 of them at one circuit court: this is nearly $2\frac{1}{2}$ a-year. The numbers which appear on the Justiciary Records do not in this or in any period in Scotland, whether Episcopal or Presbyterian, describe the whole number of sufferers. Committees of gentlemen in the country were authorised to try and execute; hence the whole number must have been much larger,—but the Justiciary Records may indicate the general encrease or decrease. Though the Government of Charles II in Scotland had their hands full with another and a more fearful persecution—that of the saints of God—yet witchcraft was not neglected by them. The delusion may now in various lands have been giving way, and there may have been intervals of several years in Scotland when there was no execution for witchcraft, but Sir George M'Kenzie, the Lord Advocate of the day, had no favour either for witches or Presbyterians. The first year after the Restoration, 1661, there were not less than twenty executions; fourteen commissions for trials were issued by the Privy Council in one day! Other more congenial employment in cruelty, and the growing change of the public mind on the sub-

ject, may make some of the twenty-eight years of persecution blank years in the history of witchcraft executions; but in 1678 ten poor women were at once convicted on their own confession. All that can be alleged to the discredit of the kirk-sessions of the Presbyterian church, and which to some who have not considered the power of prejudice—religious in its aspect—may even seem marvellous is, that a body of men whom the records of the church prove to have been so eminent promoters of popular education, so humane to the poor and the suffering, and so self-denied and patriotic, did not break through so fearful a delusion, and spare their country the dishonour of such unwarrantable cruelty. In this respect the result only shows, that the same spell which had bound the strongest minds of England bound them. None but the most unreasonable will blame them for not being before all the men of their age and of Christendom; no candid man will, on this account, think less highly of their Christian character and attainments. I have been indebted for the above facts to a long and able article in the Foreign Quarterly Review for June, 1830, on “Demonology and Witchcraft,” to which I refer the reader for further information. In some of the remarks of the writer I cannot concur, but his digest of facts is very important.

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